

Contracts of Peace and Mediation: Urban Leagues and Regional Peace Alliances in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Empire

Contratos de paz y mediación:
ligas urbanas y alianzas regionales de paz en el Imperio bajomedieval y en la Edad Moderna temprana

Contrats de paix et médiation:
ligues urbaines et alliances régionales de paix dans le Saint-Empire à la fin du Moyen Âge et au début des temps modernes

Bake eta bitartekaritza kontratuak:
Hiri ligak eta eskualdeko bake aliantzak Behe Erdi Aroan eta Aro Moderno goiztiarrean

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Abstract: In the Holy Roman Empire, urban leagues and regional peace alliances (Landfriedensbünde) were key elements of peace-keeping and peace-making. The rich Latin and vernacular terminology and their patterns of organization present parallels to the Castilian hermandades. Members of peace-keeping alliances showed an important social diversity that could lead to tensions. Often based on temporary contracts, such associations had to be renegotiated. After an overview, the article presents three short examples for different types: the 'mixed' Swabian League (1488-1534); urban leagues from the Rhine Valley/Swabia and the Hansa, which shares many features with the other leagues and should be compared with them.

Keywords: Holy Roman Empire. 13th-16th century. Urban leagues. Regional peace alliances. Peace. Comparison with Castile.

Resumen: En el Sacro Imperio Romano Germánico premoderno, las ligas urbanas y las alianzas regionales de paz (Landfriedensbünde) eran elementos clave para salvaguardar y restablecer la paz. La rica terminología latina y vernácula de estas alianzas tiene mucho en común con las hermandades de Castilla —similar a sus patrones organizativos—. A menudo, los Landfriedensbünde sólo se concluían por periodos cortos y debían renegociarse periódicamente. Los orígenes sociales muy diversos de sus miembros podían provocar tensiones. Tras una visión general, se expondrán tres breves ejemplos de diferentes tipos: la Liga Suaba (mixta, 1488-1534); las ligas urbanas del valle del Rin/Suabia y la Liga Hanseática. Esta última tiene muchos rasgos en común con las otras asociaciones y debe compararse con ellas.

Palabras clave: Sacro Imperio Romano Germánico. Siglos XIII-XVI. Ligas urbanas. Alianzas regionales de paz. Paz. Comparación con Castilla.

Résumé: Dans le Saint-Empire, ligues urbaines et alliances régionales de paix (Landfriedensbünde) étaient des instruments-clés de la sauvegarde et du rétablissement de la paix. La riche terminologie latine et vernaculaire montre des parallèles avec le cas de la Castille, de même que leurs modèles respectifs d'organisation. Basées souvent sur des contrats temporaires, les Landfriedensbünde devaient régulièrement être renégociées. La diversité sociale de leurs membres pouvait provoquer des tensions. Après un aperçu général, l'article présente trois courts exemples de types différents: la Ligue de Souabe (mixte, 1488-1534); ligues urbaines de la Vallée du Rhin/la Souabe et la Hanse, qui partage de nombreux éléments avec les autres associations et devrait être comparée avec elles.

Mots-clés: Saint-Empire. XIII^e-XVI^e siècle. Ligues urbaines. Alliances régionales de paix. Paix. Comparaison avec la Castille.

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Laburpena: Germaniako Erromatar Inperio Santuan, hiri-ligak eta eskualdeko bake-aliantzak (*Landfriedensbünde*) funtsezko elementuak ziren bakea babesteko eta berrezartzeko. Aliantza horien latinezko eta tokian-tokiko terminologia aberatsak asko du komunean. Gaztelako ermandadeekin eta bere antolaketa-ereduekin. *Landfriedenbündeak*, sarritan, aldi laburretan baino ez ziren garatzen, eta aldizka birnegoziatu behar izaten ziren. Bere kideen jatorri sozial oso ezberdinek tentsioak eragin zitzaizketen. Ikuspegi orokor bat eskaini ondoren, mota ezberdinetako biru adibide labur azalduko dira: Suaba Liga (mistoa, 1488-1534); Rbin/Suabia baraneko liga urbanoak eta Liga Hanseatikoa. Azken horrek ezaugarri komun asko ditu beste elkarteekin, eta baiekin alderatu behar da.

Giltza-hitzak: Germaniako Erromatar Inperio Santua. XIII-XVI. mendeak. Hiri-ligak. Eskualdeko bake-aliantzak. Bakea. Gaztelarekiko alderaketa.

1. Introduction

Extremely fragmented in a territorial respect¹ and characterized by a large number of competing political actors, the Late Medieval and Early Modern Holy Roman Empire displayed a lively associative political culture. Urban leagues² and regional peace alliances (*Landfriedensbünde*)³ were key elements of peace-keeping and peace-making. The membership of the latter (which had urban, princely, noble and seigneurial members, and, sometimes, even the emperor/king of the Romans) showed an important social diversity that could lead to internal tensions. Both types of associations were meant for peace-keeping, but were also used as instruments for the defence of the very diverging interests of their participants. Based on treaties and contracts, in contrast to the Swiss Confederation, in most cases, in the Holy Roman Empire, such alliances were only concluded for some years and had to be renegotiated—a procedure that introduced elements of instability and fluctuation. In the Medieval and Early Modern Empire, new agreements and founding contracts of leagues and associations were made by different social partners with diverse peace-keeping methods: by towns that established their own procedures of arbitration between themselves or by regional peace leagues that sometimes created their own executive forces for their league as such. The associations also appointed special permanent officials or chose third parties as mediators or arbitrators⁴.

¹ See the following map: Germany ca. 1500, by IEG-MAPS, Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz / Andreas Kunz, 2007 cartography: Joachim Robert Moeschl, IEG-MAPS Server für digitale historische Karten / Server for digital historical maps, n.º 602. Accessed March 31, 2025. Source: http://www.iegmaps.de/gif/p500d_a4.htm

² On urban leagues, see: Eva-Marie Distler, *Städtebünde im deutschen Spätmittelalter: eine rechtshistorische Untersuchung zu Begriff, Verfassung und Funktion* (Frankfurt am Main, Klostermann: 2006). Christian Jörg, ed., *Städtebünde und städtische Außenpolitik. Träger, Instrumentarien und Konflikte während des hohen und späten Mittelalters* (Ostfildern, Thorbecke, 2019); Bernhard Kreutz, *Städtebünde und Städtetz am Mittelrhein im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2005); Regula Schmid, Klara Hübner and Heinrich Speich, eds., *Bündnisdynamik. Träger, Ziele und Mittel politischer Bünde im Mittelalter* (Vienna, Zürich: LIT, 2020).

³ On *Landfriedensbünde*, see: Horst Carl and Hendrik Baumbach, «Was ist Landfrieden? Und was ist Gegenstand der Landfriedensforschung?», in *Landfrieden – epochenübergreifend. Neue Perspektiven der Landfriedensforschung auf Verfassung, Recht, Konflikt*, ed. by Horst Carl and Hendrik Baumbach (Berlin, Duncker & Humblot, 2018), 3–49; Christian Jörg, «Kooperation-Konfrontation-Pragmatismus. Oberdeutsche Städtebünde und Landfrieden zur Mitte des 14. Jahrhunderts», *ibid.*, 51–84; Hendrik Baumbach, *Königliche Gerichtsbarkeit und Landfriedenssorge im deutschen Spätmittelalter* (Cologne, Weimar, Böhlau, 2017). For the problem of the translation of *Landfrieden*, see: Duncan Hardy, «Landfrieden», in *Handbuch Frieden im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit / Handbook of Peace in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Irene Dingel et al. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter/Oldenbourg, 2021), 151–169: «Thus, while the word *Landfrieden* may appear to refer to a straightforward idea —“the peace of the Land”— it had multiple overlapping meanings, some of which changed substantially over time. The Latin equivalents to *Landfrieden* in documents and narratives produced between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries make this diversity of meanings apparent: it could be translated as either *pax* or *treuga*, often qualified by a generalizing or officialising adjective (*communis*, *generalis*, or *publica*) or defined in relation to a geographical or political space (*terrae*, *provincialis*) -. Even the prefix *Land-* was a multivalent term in early new high German» (151–152). The author chooses not to translate the word.

⁴ On arbitration, see for example: Hendrik Baumbach and Claudia Garnier, «Konzepte und Praktiken der Schiedsgerichtsbarkeit im römisch-deutschen Reich vom 12. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert», *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte* 155 (2019): 235–250.

The respective historiography of the «associative culture» of the medieval Empire⁵ and the Iberian Peninsula shows some striking contrasts. The Spanish historiography about *hermandades* often privileges the study of these alliances according to a chronological model divided in three main phases: 1. The period of genesis of the movement of *hermandades* (11th century–1282); 2. 1282–1325, a period of predominance of huge *hermandades* with political ambitions to assert their interests on the level of the kingdom(s) [*grandes hermandades generales o mayores*]⁶; 3. The reign of the dynasty of Trastámara (1325–1370)⁷. Some authors also mention three «key moments», described as the «golden age» of the *hermandades*: 1282 (the sedition of the future King Sancho IV; 1295 (the minority of King Fernando IV); 1312–1317 (the minority of King Alphonso XI)⁸. This historiographical panorama is completed by specialized studies about the period of the Catholic Kings, the 15th century, etc.⁹.

For the medieval Holy Roman Empire, the historiographical tradition dedicated to urban leagues (*Städtebünde*) describes them as a phenomenon of *longue durée* and stresses rather the continuity between the different leagues (that sometimes were renewed and re-negotiated in the same area for several centuries): examples: edition of sources by Konrad Ruser (13th century–1549)¹⁰, studies of scholars like Eva-Marie Distler who studies urban leagues from 1226 to the end of the 15th century¹¹, Duncan Hardy [1346–1521]¹², dictionary entries¹³, etc. So, except for

⁵ See for example: Duncan Hardy, *Associative Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire, Upper Germany, 1346–1521* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁶ José María Mínguez Fernández, «Las hermandades generales de los concejos en la Corona de Castilla: objetivos, estructura interna y contradicciones en sus manifestaciones iniciales», in *Concejos y ciudades en la Edad Media hispánica: II Congreso de Estudios Medievales* (Madrid: Fundación Sánchez-Albornoz, 1990), 537–568.

⁷ César González Mínguez, «Aproximación al estudio del “movimiento hermandino” en Castilla y León», *Medievalismo: Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales* 1 (1991): 35–55, particularly 51–55. *Id.* «Aproximación al estudio del “movimiento hermandino” en Castilla y León (Conclusión)», *Medievalismo: Boletín de la Sociedad Española de Estudios Medievales* 2 (1992): 29–60. A similar classification is already adopted by in the late 19th century: Konrad Häbler, «Über die älteren Hermandades in Kastilien», *Historische Zeitschrift* 53, n.º 3 (1885): 385–401; *id.* «Die kastilischen Hermandades zur Zeit Heinrich's IV. (1454–1474)», *Historische Zeitschrift* 56, n.º 1 (1888): 40–50.

⁸ Eduardo Fuentes Ganzo, «Pactismo, Cortes y hermandades en León y Castilla (siglos XIII–XV)», in *El contrato político en la Corona de Castilla: cultura y sociedad políticas entre los siglos X y XVI*, ed. by François Foronda and Ana Isabel Carrasco Manchado (Madrid: Dykinson, 2008), 415–452, here 425.

⁹ For this period, see for example: Antonio Álvarez de Morales, «La evolución de las Hermandades en el siglo XV», in *La ciudad hispánica durante los siglos XIII al XVI*, ed. by Emilio Sáez, Cristina Segura Graiño and Margarita Cantera Montenegro (Madrid: Universidad Complutense: 1985), vol. I, 93–103; Yolanda Guerrero Navarrete, «La Hermandad de 1476 y Burgos: Un factor decisivo en la transformación del poder municipal a fines de la Edad Media», *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 16 (1986): 533–556; José Luis Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades de Castilla», *Anuario de historia del derecho español* 58 (1988): 277–412.

¹⁰ Konrad Ruser, ed. *Die Urkunden und Akten der oberdeutschen Städtebünde vom 13. Jahrhundert bis 1549*, 3 vol. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979–2005).

¹¹ Distler, *Untersuchung...*, list of leagues: 231–243.

¹² Hardy, *Associative Political Culture...*

¹³ Bernhard Kreutz, «Städtebünde (Mittelalter / Frühe Neuzeit)» (2011), in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* (accessed August 20, 2025, [http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Städtebünde_\(Mittelalter/Frühe_Neuzeit\)](http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Städtebünde_(Mittelalter/Frühe_Neuzeit))): period: 13th–16th century; *id.*, «Rheinische Städtebünde (13./14.

studies about individual regional examples or a single league, in general, most scholars choose the period from the 13th to the mid-sixteenth century, whereas for the Spanish *hermandades* a large part of studies is dedicated to the period before the creation of the *Santa Hermandad* by the Catholic Kings (1476)¹⁴. Potential links between the movement of the *hermandades* and the *Comuneros* are not so frequently discussed¹⁵. Nevertheless, some studies, as the monography of Antonio Álvarez de Morales refer to the entire period (13th century–17th/18th century)¹⁶. For her article about the «contribution of towns to the political stability of the kingdom», María Asenjo González chooses nearly the same period as the German historiography about *Städtebünde*: 1250–1520¹⁷. It would be interesting to compare the associative movements of both areas, the Spanish kingdoms and the medieval and Early Modern Empire, for this entire period. In this article this cannot be done and so the comparison will be limited to some elements. For the medieval Empire, the chosen examples are linked to the geographical area where urban leagues and *Landfriedensbünde* (regional peace leagues) were founded more frequently than in others: they existed mostly in relatively fragmented areas with territories and towns that were immediate to the emperor (especially those that, in the 13th century, were possessions of the dynasty of the Staufer) and other Upper German localities around the Rhine and in Swabia, in the Wetterau, etc. These examples are completed by those of towns from the Hansa area where the emperor's influence was relatively weak and that shows different characteristics.

The important variation of different types of contracts and associations that served to re-establish, maintain or conclude peace is reflected in the vernacular and Latin terminology describing such urban and peace-keeping leagues. It is difficult to give an English translation of the medieval and early modern German terminology used for multiple forms of associations that could take the form of quasi-horizontal connections, contractual relationships and bi- or multilateral treaties like *Bund*, *Bündnis*, *Einung*, *Vereinung*. In his recent study of the associative culture of the Medieval Empire, Duncan Hardy, who stresses the «associative political culture of the empire»¹⁸, speaks of a «proliferation of leagues, alliances and other forms of association in the period between the reigns of

Jahrhundert)» (2009), in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*. Accessed 31 March, 2025. [https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Rheinische_Städtebünde_\(13./14._Jahrhundert\)](https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Rheinische_Städtebünde_(13./14._Jahrhundert))

¹⁴ For the period of King Henry IV and the accession of the Catholic Kings, see: María Asenjo González, «La colaboración de las ciudades en la estabilidad política del reino (1250-1520)», in *Gobernar en tiempos de crisis. Las quiebras dinásticas en el ámbito hispánico (1250-1808)*, ed. by José Manuel Nieto Soria and María Victoria López-Cordón Cortezo (Madrid: Sílex, 2008), 175-197, here 189-195.

¹⁵ Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades», 332-340; for comparative aspects with Germany, see also Ludolf Pelizaeus, *Dynamik der Macht. Städtischer Widerstand und Konfliktbewältigung im Reich Karls V.* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2007).

¹⁶ Antonio Álvarez de Morales, *Las Hermandades expresión del movimiento comunitario en España* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1974).

¹⁷ For the period of King Henry IV and the accession of the Catholic Kings, see: María Asenjo González, «La colaboración», 189-195.

¹⁸ Hardy, *Associative Political Culture...*, 10.

Charles IV¹⁹ and Charles V^{20,21}, and translates these words with ‘league’, ‘alliance’ and ‘union’) and *Gesellschaft*, *Vertrag*, *Verständnis*, *Verschreibung* with ‘society’, ‘treaty’, ‘understanding’, ‘obligation’²². In Latin, in the Medieval Empire, as in the Iberian Peninsula, those associations are described as *amicitia*, *communitas*, *compositio*, *concordia*, *confoederatio*, *conjunctio*, *conventio*, *conventus*, *foedus*, *fraternitas*, *harmonia*, *liga*, *pactio*, *pactum*, *societas*, *unio*, *universitas*²³.

Who were the actors of such urban and mixed associations? In what way were they influenced by urban and/or dynastic interests? How effective were their peacekeeping methods? What do we know about procedures for handling conflicting interests? What importance had the geographical extension? In a first part, the article gives an overview of different types of collective security systems and an example of a ‘working plan’, some constitutional elements and practices. The second part presents short case studies for three different types. Some organizations were successful and relatively stable, while others failed and were not extended. What factors did determine the success or failure of such collective peace efforts?

The three chosen examples are 1) The Swabian League (a mixed league with membership of towns, princes and the king of the Romans, 1488–1534). Concluded for a limited time, it had to be renewed regularly (in 1496, 1500, 1512 and 1523)²⁴. 2) Urban leagues from the Rhine Valley / the Wetterau / Swabia (several consecutive leagues for ca. 200 years since 1298, which comprised up to 31 member cities) and 3) an example of the actions of the Hansa (classified as an own type of association by historiography). This last part will show that in spite of the traditional classification of the Hansa that, in general, qualifies it as a particular type of association that was above all meant for the common defence of economic interests²⁵ and even of the fact that the Hansa itself denied several times being a real league, the latter shares many features with ‘normal’ peace alliances and urban

¹⁹ About Emperor Charles IV (Luxemburg, *1316–†1378), see: Monnet, Pierre, *Charles IV, un empereur en Europe* (Paris: Fayard, 2020); Olaf B. Rader, *Kaiser Karl IV.* (Munich, Beck, 2023).

²⁰ Emperor Charles V (Habsburg, *1500–†1558) in Spain King Carlos I.

²¹ Hardy, *Associative Political Culture...*, 10.

²² Hardy, *Associative Political Culture...*, 10.

²³ Gisela Naegle, «Einleitung», in *Frieden schaffen und sich verteidigen im Spätmittelalter / Faire la paix et se défendre à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Ead. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 33; Ana Isabel Carrasco Manchado, «Léxico político en el Seguro de Tordesillas: conflicto, pactos y autoridad real», in *Du contrat d’alliance au contrat politique*, ed. by François Foronda and Ana Isabel Carrasco Manchado (Toulouse: CNRS/Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 2007), 85–137 and other articles of this book.

²⁴ On this league, see: Horst Carl, *Der Schwäbische Bund 1488–1534* (Leinfelden-Echterdingen: DRW: 2000).

²⁵ Tobias Boestad, *Pour le profit du commun marchand. La genèse de la Hanse (XII^e siècle-milieu du XIV^e siècle)* (Genève, Droz, 2022), 263–317; Philipp Höhn, «Pluralismus statt Homogenität. Hanse, Konfliktträume und Rechtspluralismus im vormodernen Nordeuropa (1400–1800)», in *Städtebünde und städtische Außenpolitik*, ed. by Roland Deigendesch and Christian Jörg (Ostfildern, Thorbecke, 2019), 261–290; Albrecht Cordes, «Die Rechtsnatur der Hanse, politische, juristische und historische Diskurse», *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 19 (2001): 49–62; Sören Koch, Ulla Kypta and Johann Ruben Leiss, «Pluralistische Governance: Die Erforschung hansischer Kooperation jenseits von klassischen Staatskonzepten», *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 140 (2022): 59–91.

leagues. (The Hansa's own refutation of this quality was also due to the wish to avoid the potentially high costs of collective liability in times of conflicts with the English, for example in 1469²⁶). Therefore, what has been too much neglected by traditional historiography, it should also be compared with other associations like *Landfriedensbünde* and 'normal' urban leagues. This aspect of linking the comparison of the Hansa and *Landfriedensbünde* more closely to the study of urban leagues (what has rarely been done until now) and to show some parallels with the evolution and organization of the Spanish *hermandades* is the main purpose of this article. The latter aspect, not very much explored by historiography until now, merits to be deepened.

2. Overview: framework conditions, conflict resolution and types of associations

The Holy Roman Empire was an electoral monarchy ruled by several competing dynasties. At the beginning of the particularly intense period of urban leagues and peace leagues, during the *Interregnum* (1250–1273) after the end of the dynasty of the Staufer, the urban members of the league from the Rhine Valley negotiated with various claimants to the throne. First, they recognized King William of Holland (King of the Romans 1247–1256) who confirmed their league. After his death and a double election, they got in touch with the two new candidates, the English prince Richard of Cornwall (titular king of Germany 1257–1272, he was the younger brother of King Henry III of England) and his rival, King Alphonso X of Castile (elected as King of the Romans in 1257, he renounced in 1275). It is particularly interesting that, in 1282, the latter also had to deal with a similar situation in Castile, the revolt of his son and heir, the future King Sancho IV. In this conflict, Sancho encouraged the creation of *hermandades*, for example of the *Hermandad General* of the *concejos* of León and Galicia, a *hermandad* of 65 *concejos* of Castile (concluded in Burgos in May 1282) and a united *hermandad* of both associations (July 8, 1282). Nevertheless, after his accession to the throne, he saw those organizations as a threat to his power and decided to dissolve them²⁷. So, in this case the events in the Medieval Empire and in Castile can directly be compared.

After the *Interregnum*, in the Late Middle Ages, the three most important rival dynasties in the medieval Empire were the Luxemburg, the Wittelsbach and the Habsburg. Each time when an emperor died, his successor had to be elected—what meant negotiations with the seven Prince Electors (*Kurfürsten*) and, especially in case of double elections, also with towns because, if the newly elected emperor

²⁶ About this conflict, see: Stuart Jenks, *England, die Hanse und Preußen. Handel und Diplomatie*, vol. 2 (Cologne/Vienne: Böhlau, 1992), 697–736; John D. Fudge, *Cargoes, embargoes, and emissaries. The Commercial and Political Interaction of England and the German Hanse 1450–1510* (Toronto, Buffalo, University of Toronto Press, 1995), 18–88.

²⁷ César González Mínguez, «Aproximación al estudio» (Conclusión, 1992), here 30–35.

wanted to get their financial support, the candidate had to be recognized by them. The necessity for the emperors to find the financial means for their own election or the election of a son or other member of their dynasty was a situation that could be dangerous for the autonomy of towns that were immediate to the Empire, especially the smaller ones, because in order to finance their projects, emperors could be tempted to pledge them²⁸. On the other side, double elections that forced the candidates to search allies could extend the room of manoeuvre of towns. In the second half of the 14th century, emperors from the dynasty of Luxemburg as Charles IV (*1316–†1370) and his son Sigismund (*1368–†1437) had no important territorial stronghold in the central parts of the Empire. Frederick III (*1415–†1493) from the Habsburg dynasty stayed in his hereditary possessions and, for more than twenty years, kept away from the mainland of the Empire²⁹. In contrast to the French king, the emperors had no own extended apparatus of local royal officers and, in case of conflicts with powerful princes or exterior attacks, the towns could not really rely on their help. The Habsburg and the Wittelsbach often participated in regional conflicts and feuds in a similar way as ‘ordinary’ princes. This made them suspect as mediators or conciliators because the other parties feared that they might pursue much more their own interests, the well-being of their own hereditary territories and their dynasties than those of the empire. So, for example, the other members of the Swabian League founded in 1488 were hostile to the attempts of the emperors Maximilian I (*1459–†1519) and Charles V (*1500–†1558) to assume a function as *Haupt und Beschirmer* (chief and protector) of this association³⁰.

2.1. Conflict resolution in the Holy Roman Empire: ‘friendly law’, courts and associations

Imperial law courts did not possess effective means of coercion. After the foundation of the Imperial Chamber (*Reichskammergericht*) in 1495, territorial lords and towns strived for privileges that prohibited appellation to the imperial courts and prevented the emperor from evoking the suits to his own jurisdiction (*privilegia de non evocando*³¹ and *de non appellando*)³². Exceptions were the case of denied or too much delayed justice. Territorial princes and immediate free and imperial towns strived to get such privileges that could be restricted (to a certain litigation value (*Streitwert*) or legal subject matters (*Rechtsgegenstände*) or be granted unlimited. Princes and immediate towns tried to secure their territories and subjects against all ‘foreign’ jurisdictions, like the regional imperial courts and the Westphalian *Feme*–

²⁸ Götz Landwehr, *Die Verpfändung der deutschen Reichsstädte im Mittelalter* (Graz, Cologne, Böhlau, 1967).

²⁹ Paul-Joachim Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III. (1440-1493), Hof, Regierung und Politik*. 3 vol. (Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau, 1997).

³⁰ Horst Carl, *Der Schwäbische Bund...*, 57.

³¹ Recent overview: Ulrich Eisenhardt, *Kaiserliche Gerichtsprivilegien. Ihre Bedeutung für die Entwicklung der Rechtspflege im Alten Reich* (Cologne, Vienna: Böhlau, 2023), 58–78.

³² Ulrich Eisenhardt, *Die kaiserlichen ‘Privilegia de non appellando’* (Cologne, Vienne: Böhlau, 1980).

and *Freigerichte*³³. So, the jurisdictional system reflected the plurality of territories and lords: In his attempt to present a typology of pre-modern law courts for Southern Germany, exploiting a sample of 4640 law suits at the *Reichskammergericht*, the highest imperial court, that are preserved in the *Hauptstaatsarchiv* in Munich, Alexander Denzler established a list of 2220 courts and 154 types of courts, which he classified in twelve major categories³⁴.

Delegation or the appointment of commissioners was another means of solving conflicts in faraway parts of the Empire. In 1440–1493, in the reign of Frederick III, the latter issued 2600 orders for commissions³⁵. Commissioners could also be chosen from towns: between the *Oberrhein* region and the Main, Straßburg was particularly implied in this activity. Commissions for the resolution of conflicts were also directed at the urban governments of Speyer, Worms, Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Ulm, Augsburg, Nördlingen, Ravensburg and others³⁶. In addition, the system of courts and the preservation of peace and security was completed by other means of conflict resolution, like leagues, alliances, peace unions and numerous forms of mediation, arbitration and conciliation. For the execution of judgements and to assure the respect of court decisions by third parties, the good will and cooperation of political partners as princes, barons and towns were crucial. Codes of honour played a decisive role. For the acceptance of decisions, judgements and other law acts and measures, in order not to lose someone's face, it was important to show that certain acts were voluntary and taken freely without violence, pressure or constraint. It was important to stress this aspect by words and/or deeds. Public expressions of consent and consensus³⁷ made agreements more

³³ About the latter, see: Heiner Lück, «Feme, Femgericht», in *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte*, 2nd ed., ed. by Albrecht Cordes et al. (Berlin: Schmidt, 2008), vol. 1, col. 1535–1543.

³⁴ Alexander Denzler, «Versuch einer quantitativen Analyse der süddeutschen Gerichtsvielfalt», in *Unter der Linde und vor dem Kaiser. Neue Perspektiven auf Gerichtsvielfalt und Gerichtslandschaften*, ed. by Anja Amend-Traut, Josef Bongartz et al. (Vienna, Böhlau, 2020), 189–190, list 207–208, graphic 191. The twelve major types described there are: *Hofgerichte* (courts at princely/noble courts); *Stadtgerichte* (town courts); *Kaiserliche Landgerichte* (imperial regional/territorial courts); *Bürgermeister und Rat* (mayors and urban councils); *Regierung* ([territorial] government); *Fürstl. Landgerichte* (princely regional/territorial courts); *Personen/Würdenträger* (individuals / officers); *Juristenfakultät* (law faculties); *Zentgerichte* (tax courts); *Kommissar* (delegate judges); *Amt* (administrative institution/office); *Lehensgerichte* (feudal courts).

³⁵ Ralf Mitsch, *Das Kommissionswesen unter Kaiser Friedrich III.*, revised version of the authors *Habilitationsschrift*, University of Mannheim 2000 (electronic version: Mainz: Regesta Imperii, Works in progress, 2015). Accessed March 31, 2015. https://www.regesta-imperii.de/fileadmin/user_upload/downloads/Mitsch_2015.pdf, 218. *Id.*, «Das Eingreifen Friedrichs III. in innerstädtische Konflikte: Aspekte von Herrschaft und Regierung im Reich des ausgehenden Mittelalters», *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, 25, n.° 1 (1998), 1–54.

³⁶ Mitsch, *Das Kommissionswesen...*, 906–972; on Frankfurt: 906–917.

³⁷ Bernd Schneidmüller, «Konsensuale Herrschaft. Ein Essay über Formen und Konzepte politischer Ordnung im Mittelalter», in *Reich, Regionen und Europa in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Peter Moraw*, ed. by Paul-Joachim Heinig et al. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000), 53–87; Jean-Philippe Genet, Dominique Le Page and Olivier Mattéoni, eds., *Consensus et représentation. Le pouvoir symbolique en Occident (1300–1640)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2017); Verena Epp and Christoph H. F. Meyer, eds., *Recht und Konsens im frühen Mittelalter* (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2017); Linda Dohmen and Tilmann Trausch, eds., *Entscheiden und Regieren. Konsens als Element vormoderner Entscheidungsfindung in transkultureller Perspektive* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2019).

binding and reliable, even if the voluntary character of those expressions was a mere fiction³⁸. Sometimes negotiations could be continued after a judgement and, later, the final result could be presented as the result of an amiable agreement of the involved parties³⁹.

In the context of conflict resolution, in the medieval Empire, the formula *minne oder recht* ('love' or 'law')⁴⁰ played an important role⁴¹. Before 1290, Latin sources use formulas with a similar meaning as «amicabilis compositio vel iustitia (ius, iudicium, sententia)»; «amicabiliter vel secundum iustitiam», «amicitia vel iustitia», «iustitia vel amor» or «iudicium vel concordia»⁴². Other formulas also strongly referred to the sphere of emotions: «friendship» (*Freundschaft*), «friendly law» (*freundliches Recht*, in the sense of a procedure that assured protection from persecution in court⁴³). In the 15th century, in the Swiss Confederation, the members assured themselves of their faithfulness (*Treue*), and their mutual love and loyalty as Confederates, bound by a common oath. So, in 1495, Bern addressed the *Schultheiss* (the most important town official) and the Council of Lucerne as «the pious, prudent, wise *Schultheiss* and Council of Lucerne, our good friends and faithful, dear Confederates» (*Den frommen fürsichtigen wisen schultheiss vnnd Ratt zu Lucern, vnns[ern] guten frunden vnd getreuen lieben Eidgnossen*)⁴⁴.

In the long term, the terminology has undergone some changes. So, according to the studies of Hannes Ziegler, who examines the time of the 16th and 17th centuries after the religious Reformation, the apparition of the reference to 'trust' (*Vertrauen*) only occurred since the late 15th century⁴⁵. In a first stage, the

³⁸ Gerd Althoff, «Freiwilligkeit und Konsensfassaden: emotionale Ausdrucksformen in der Politik des Mittelalters», in *Pathos, Affekt, Gefühl. Die Emotionen in den Künsten*, ed. by Klaus Herding and Bernhard Stumpfhaus (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 150–151.

³⁹ Anna Rad, 'Minne oder recht'. *Konflikt und Konsens zur Zeit Karls IV. und König Wenzels* (Vienna, Cologne, Böhlau, 2020), 272.

⁴⁰ About that formula of medieval law language, see for example: Rad, 'Minne...'; Christa Bertelsmeier-Kierst and Albrecht Cordes, «Minne und Recht», in *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte*, ed. by Albrecht Cordes et al., 2nd ed. (Berlin: Schmidt: 2016), vol. 3, col. 1537–1541; Hans Hattenhauer, «'Minne und recht' als Ordnungsprinzipien des mittelalterlichen Rechts», *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Germanistische Abteilung* 80 (1963): 325–344.

⁴¹ The term «minne» is also linked to the literary genre of *Minnesang* (that celebrates the ideal of courtly love). In the Middle Ages, *minne* can mean «*amor* / *Liebe*» and refer to love (as a sentiment, in an erotic and even in the concrete sense of a love act), *philia* (as love between friends), the beloved person, or *caritas*, the love for God, the act of mercy of a ruler, etc (Rad, 'Minne...', 19).

⁴² Rad, 'Minne...', 22; Ernst Dittmer, «Untersuchungen zum Formelschatz der frühen deutschen Urkunden im Verhältnis zum Lateinischen. Die Formel, 'Minne oder recht'», *Sprachwissenschaft* 4 (1979): 24–52.

⁴³ Rad, 'Minne...', 113–127.

⁴⁴ Quoted after: Andreas Würzler, *Die Tagsatzung der Eidgenossen. Politik, Kommunikation und Symbolik einer repräsentativen Institution im europäischen Kontext (1470–1798)* (Epfendorf/Neckar: bibliotheca academica, 2013), 412. About the emotional language in this context, see also: Gisela Naegle, «Concentric circles of political emotions? Proximity and distance in medieval towns of the Holy Roman Empire», in *Emociones políticas y políticas de la emoción. Las sociedades urbanas en la Baja Edad Media*, ed by José Antonio Jara Fuente (Madrid: Dykinson, 2021), 171–197.

⁴⁵ Hannes Ziegler, *Trauen und Glauben. Vertrauen in der politischen Kultur des Alten Reiches im Konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Didymos: Affalterbach, 2017), 35–38.

political actors of the time spoke more of ‘distrust’ (*Misstrauen*) than of ‘trust’. Contemporary observers already attributed this danger of mistrust to the religious conflicts between Protestants and Catholics. This terminology was particularly used in the debates of the Imperial diets of the 1540s about the relations of both groups, its consequences for the political and legal landscape of the Empire and the negotiations that lead to the *Religionsfrieden* (Religious Peace) of Augsburg of 1555, an important milestone in the history of the Early Modern Empire⁴⁶. According to Ziegler, the introduction of the terminology of trust was also an effect of the theology of Martin Luther and Philipp Melanchthon. But in spite of the fact that it was used especially by Protestants, it was not directly introduced by these two authors in the political and legal debate⁴⁷. Older texts rather used the verb form⁴⁸ or referred to the concept of *Treue* (faithfulness/loyalty, a word that, in German, is *not* a synonym of *Vertrauen* and closer to feudal law describing the relations between lord and vassal). (Until today there is the legal expression of «Treu und Glauben» / «guter Glauben» (equivalent to the French *bonne foi*).

In the case of the *hermandades*, the terminology also sometimes refers to the terminology of faithfulness/feudal relations and some texts speak of *pleito homenaje*⁴⁹. This terminology appears for example in the documents about the relation of the *hermandades* of the Kingdom of Castile and those of León and Galicia (1282) kept in the municipal archives in Nájera⁵⁰.

In the medieval Empire, to assure peace and defend themselves, towns, princes and noblemen, who were often disappointed by the measures of the emperor, took their own measures and concluded peace leagues (*Landfriedensbünde*), urban leagues and other alliances that had to be negotiated by the involved partners. Such leagues were concluded on a contractual basis for a limited time and frequently had to be renegotiated and prolonged. They presented a double character: they could serve the interests of the emperor and assure peace and security or they could be used as a political instrument of opposition against him. So, depending on the political situation they were encouraged by the emperor or he tried to prohibit and dissolve them (see the examples of the prohibitions of potentially dangerous leagues by Charles IV (1356) and the Swabian League of 1488–1534 favoured by the Habsburg, see below). The same can be said about the relations of the Kings

⁴⁶ Ziegler, *Trauen...*, 45–64.

⁴⁷ Ziegler, *Trauen...*, 38–41

⁴⁸ Ziegler, *Trauen...*, 35.

⁴⁹ María Asenjo González, «Ciudades y Hermandades en la Corona de Castilla: Aproximación socio-política», *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 27, n.º 1 (1997): 103–146, here 127.

⁵⁰ María Ángeles Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales. Las jerarquías urbanas a través de las hermandades bajomedievales», *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 48, n.º1 (2018): 81–115; González, «Aproximación al estudio...», 1992: 54–58, here 58 (Apéndice documental I, «Compromiso de ayuda mutua entre la hermandad de León y Galicia y la de Castilla», kept in the Municipal Archives of Nájera, doc. 5: July 8, Valladolid, 1282: «E nos toda la hermandat de Leon e de Galicia façemos pleyto omenaie a toda la hermandat del regno de Castiella de uos ayudar bien e / lealmente e guardar e mantener todas estas cosas sobredichas e cada unas delas». Discussion of this document which is preserved in different versions with variations in this passage: *ibid.*, pp. 31–32. Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales», 91.

Sancho IV and Henry IV to the *hermandades*. In his revolt against his father, Sancho fostered the conclusion of such associations, but, later, as a king, dissolved them.

In the German case, most of the alliances showed certain ‘typical’ traits: the association was based upon an oath (*coniuratio*), regulated by a founding document (*Bundesbrief*) that defined the obligations of the members and the internal constitution of the alliance. It could also contain dispositions about the respective weight of individual members (number of voices, procedures of decision making, regional subsections and importance of military contingents that should be deployed by each member in case of conflicts; arbitration procedures). In urban leagues, often one or two towns exercised a leading function as *Vorort* and acted as a kind of secretary who convoked the members, was the privileged place of the assemblies of the alliance, etc. (as Ulm for the Swabian urban league and Worms and Mainz for the urban league of the Rhine Valley). Often, but not always, the associations had a common treasure. In general, the founding act provided for arbitration procedures in the event of conflicts between members, or sometimes even in internal conflicts in a member town⁵¹. These aspects provide an interesting basis for comparisons with the Spanish *hermandades* where towns as Burgos and Toledo played a similar role for their respective leagues⁵².

In contrast to the German peace-keeping associations, the Swiss Confederation was not based upon one single confederation treaty. Instead, its thirteen cantons were tied together by at least a dozen different treaties among the several participants. Sealed between 1291 and 1513, they were unlimited in time. Only the last one, which was concluded between the twelve already existing members and Appenzell, was signed by all of them in 1513⁵³. Different types of contracts were concluded on several levels – mostly in order to secure peace, security or economic advantages: as contracts between towns (ex. treaties of common citizenship / *traités de combourgeoisie* / *Burgrechtsverträge*) that granted the citizenship of one town to one or more befriended other towns (especially in Switzerland, ex. Bern-Fribourg (1243–1403)⁵⁴, urban leagues (often with a mixed character that also included princes and noblemen), as a system of urban leagues, or as leagues of peace (*Landfriedensbünde*).

Another means that could also take the form of contracts were temporary coalitions or the hiring of the services of local noblemen and mercenaries by towns (as in Nuremberg, Frankfurt and Metz) or, especially for smaller or medium size

⁵¹ Gisela Naegle, «Défendre la ville: négocier, s’allier, faire la guerre et faire la paix (villes allemandes, XIII^e–XV^e siècle)», in *Villes et construction étatique en Europe du Nord-Ouest du XIII^e au XV^e siècle*, ed. by Franck Collard (Levallois-Perret: Bréal, 2022), 44.

⁵² About urban hierarchies in the *hermandades*, see: Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales», 81–115.

⁵³ Andreas Würigler, «‘The League of Discordant Members’ or How the Old Swiss Confederation operated and how it managed to survive for so long», in *The Republican Alternative. The Netherlands and Switzerland compared*, ed. by André Holenstein, Thomas Maissen and Maarten Prak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 29–30.

⁵⁴ Heinrich Speich, *Burgrecht. Von der Einbürgerung zum politischen Bündnis im Spätmittelalter*. (Ostfildern, Thorbecke: 2019).

towns, shelter contracts between towns and princes⁵⁵. On the urban level, towns also concluded contracts between each other to solve practical matters, like the interurban recognition of the training as craftsmen, for example between Frankfurt and Mainz, for economic purposes, rights of safe conduct or about the persecution of criminals.

The founding acts of *hermandades* contain similar dispositions: bilateral protection of citizens in the other town(s), protection of roads and travelling merchants. Nevertheless, in spite of the importance of economic matters, the nature of the respective economic interests could be different: some of the Castilian examples referred to the protection of the rights and property of beekeepers (ex. Hermandad Vieja de Toledo and Talavera [1300] with Ciudad Real, 1302) and, very prominently, to matters of cattle and transhumance. In the south-western German regions and the Wetterau beekeeping was not so important and in low mountain ranges there was no long-distance transhumance between summer and winter pastures. In these areas, long-distance trade and the exchange of products fabricated by craftsmen were in the centre of urban interests. In the Hansa area, the focus of interest and the importance of maritime trade was more similar to those of the Cantabrian towns and their associations⁵⁶.

As elsewhere in Europe, and in the case of the Spanish *hermandades*⁵⁷, urban leagues appeared especially in situations of a power vacuum. The time of the Great Interregnum after the end of the Hohenstaufen (1250-1273) saw the foundation of the Rhenish League in 1254⁵⁸. This situation can be compared to the conflicts of the time of the minorities of Fernando IV and Alphonso XI in Castile when different parties struggled for the control and tutorship of the minor king⁵⁹ or, in the 15th century, the military conflicts between the parties of Henry IV and his half-brother Alphonso when towns (*concejos*) and *hermandades* were considered important allies to strengthen the position of one of the parties / claimants to the throne. In the German case the fact that part of the towns of the Rhenish league chose to support one of the candidates and others his adversary William of Holland, created diverging interests and therefore contributed to its end.

⁵⁵ For Toul and Verdun, see: Léonard Dauphant, «La ville et ses gardiens: la sauvegarde princière des cités de Toul et Verdun à la fin du Moyen Âge», in *Villes et constructions étatiques en Lorraine (XIII^e-XV^e siècles)* ed. by Id. and Dominique Adrian (Metz: Collectif, 2023), 45-58.

⁵⁶ About these towns and their associations, see: Jesús Ángel Solórzano Telechea, «Las Nereidas del Norte»: Puertos e identidad urbana en la fachada cantábrica entre los siglos XII-XV», *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante, Historia medieval*, 16 (2009-2010): 39-61.

⁵⁷ Máximo Diago Hernando, «Die politische Rolle der Städtebünde im spätmittelalterlichen Kastilien (13.-16. Jahrhundert). Selbstverteidigung, Herrschaftsstabilisierung und Friedenssicherung», in *Frieden schaffen und sich verteidigen im Spätmittelalter/Faire la paix et se défendre à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Gisela Naegle (Munich, Oldenbourg, 2012), 139-142. Accessed March 31, 2025. https://perspectivia.net/publicationen/phs/naegle_frieden/diago-hernando_rolle.

⁵⁸ Gerold Bönner, «Der Rheinische Bund von 1254/56: Voraussetzungen, Wirkungsweise, Nachleben», in *Städtebünde – Städtete im Wandel der Geschichte*, ed. by Franz J. Felten (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 13-36.

⁵⁹ Asenjo González, «Ciudades y hermandades en la Corona», 133.

As for towns, for the foundation of leagues, the common oath of the members played an important role. The text of the confirmation of the league of 1254 stresses the motives of the founders in the following words: *propter observacionem pacis iurate* and *ab omnibus pacis federe coniuratis*⁶⁰. At this time, the foundation of such an association still had religious connotations. The text also speaks of *sancta pax* and mentions Jesus Christ (*in nomine domini nostri Ihesu Christi pacem instauratam*)⁶¹. According to José Antonio Jara Fuente, in the 15th century, the terms *bien*, *paz*, *concordia*, *hermandad* and *vecindad* were key words or ‘milestones’ for the evolution of a model of urban political relations in Castile⁶². A similar observation can be made for Germany, France and the Burgundian Netherlands⁶³. Parallels also exist in the form of the condemnation of war in the founding documents of alliances and leagues and diplomatic sources, for example, in a document of the Rhenish Urban League of 1255: «pro eo quod clamoribus pauperum bellorum et guerrarum temporibus ex afflictione continua per perversorum tyrannidem miserabiliter oppressorum auditis paterniter et misericorditer exauditis, tranquillitatem et pacem» and the statement that its purpose is to also serve the common good of the entire Christian people «ac salutem et commodum tocius populi christiani»⁶⁴. The same kind of terminology also exists in French and English documents from the Hundred Years’ War⁶⁵.

In this respect, such documents are tributary to the medieval movement of Peace of God, particularly in the phase when peaces of God transformed into secular, royal, imperial or princely peaces, as in 1202 in the «Estatuts de Pau i Treva» of Cervera that spoke of «Pau i Treva del rei»⁶⁶. As in the case of the Spanish *hermandades*, in the medieval empire, the vernacular and Latin terminology points to the idea of brotherhood and other family ties. An alliance

⁶⁰ N.º 9: «Bestätigung des Rheinischen Bundes», November 10, 1255, in *Quellen zur Verfassungsgeschichte des Römisch-Deutschen Reiches im Spätmittelalter (1250-1500)*, ed. by Lorenz Weinrich (Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 36.

⁶¹ Weinrich, ed., *Quellen...*, n.º 9, 34.

⁶² José Antonio Jara Fuente, «Vecindad y parentesco. El lenguaje de las relaciones políticas en la Castilla urbana del siglo xv», in *El contrato político en la Corona de Castilla*, ed. by François Foronda and Ana Isabel Carrasco Manchado (Madrid: Dykinson, 2008), 211-239, here 239; María Asenjo González, «Concordia, pactos y acuerdos en la sociedad política urbana de la Castilla bajomedieval», *ibid.*, 125-157; Eduardo Fuentes Ganzo, «Pactismo, Cortes y hermandades en León y Castilla. Siglos xiii-xv», *ibid.*, 415-452.

⁶³ Xavier Rousseaux, «Politiques judiciaires et résolution des conflits dans les villes de l’Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge», in *Pratiques sociales et politiques judiciaires dans les villes de l’Occident à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Jacques Chiffolleau, Claude Gauvard and Andrea Zorzi (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007), 500; Nathalie Nabert, *Les réseaux d’alliance en diplomatie aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles* (Paris: Champion, 1999).

⁶⁴ Weinrich, ed., *Quellen...*, n.º 9, 32-34.

⁶⁵ Naegle, «Einleitung», 33-34.

⁶⁶ Gener Gonzalvo i Bou, «Les assemblees de Pau i Treva i l’origen de la Cort General de Catalunya», in *Les Corts a Catalunya*, ed. by Direcció General del Patrimoni Cultural Servei d’Arxius (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1991), 71-78; José Manuel Nieto Soria, «Los prolegómenos eclesiásticos de las hermandades políticas», in *El contrato político en la Corona de Castilla*, ed. by François Foronda and Ana Isabel Carrasco Manchado (Madrid: Dykinson, 2008), 43-63. Thomas N. Bisson, «The Organized Peace in Southern France and Catalonia (ca. 1140-ca. 1223)», in *Medieval France and her Pyrenean Neighbours* (London: Hambledon Press 1989), 215-236; see also: Justine Firnhaber Baker, *Violence and the State in Languedoc 1250-1400* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

of Castilian noblemen of 1469 uses the same terminology of brothers and friends: «vos ayudaremos como buenos e leales e verdaderos *hermanos e amigos* tomando vuestra causa por propia nuestra contra todas las personas del mundo sin exçeption alguna, aunque sean reys o de su estirpe, e tantas vezes quantas por vos fuereis requeridos, e asi [...] vos guardaremos toda buena e verdadera *amistat e hermandad*»⁶⁷. This terminology of *Bünde* and *hermandades* implies the idea of a certain equality and of horizontal relations. Nevertheless, as is shown by Horst Carl and Máximo Diago Hernando, the Swabian League and the Castilian *hermandades* experienced a profound change: from a corporate, rather horizontally organized institution of collective peace-keeping and defence of the interests of its members, they transformed into an instrument which was increasingly controlled by the king and territorial princes and which could also be used for purposes of territorial policy as the *conquista* of the kingdom of Granada or repression (the repression of the German Peasants' War of 1525). In both cases, these organizations of collective security showed some parallels: they developed jurisdictional functions, assemblies, an own financial system that did not depend on imperial diets or *Cortes* and mechanisms of representation of different social noble and non-noble orders⁶⁸. Nevertheless, in time and space, in the Medieval Empire and in Castile, imperial diets and *Cortes* could also be closely linked to assemblies of towns or *juntas* of *hermandades*. Assemblies of German towns⁶⁹ and *juntas* could prepare catalogues of grievances or debate matters that were also being supposed to be discussed at diets and *Cortes*⁷⁰.

In both cases there were also links to the debate about the reform of the kingdom, a tradition of noble alliances and measures against abuses of noble violence⁷¹. As to the use of the concept of peace, and the idea of the king's peace,

⁶⁷ «Alianza de amistad y confederación del marqués de Santillana, el obispo de Sigüenza y don Pedro de Velasco con don Juan Pacheco, maestre de la Orden de Santiago», Ocaña, 1 Mayo 1469, in Isabel Del Val Valdivieso, «Los bandos nobiliarios durante el reinado de Enrique IV», *Hispania* 130 (1975): 289–290, quotation 289.

⁶⁸ Horst Carl, «Identische Akteure – unterschiedliche Kommunikationsprofile. Schwäbische Bundestage und Reichstage in der Epoche Maximilians I. im Vergleich», in *Der Reichstag 1486–1613*, ed by Maximilian Lanzinner and Arno Strohmeier (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 29–54; Máximo Diago Hernando, «La cultura contractual en los medios urbanos castellanos a fines de la Edad Media», in *El contrato...* ed by Foronda, 453–490.

⁶⁹ About this type of assemblies, see: Georg Schmidt, *Der Städtetag in der Reichsverfassung* (Wiesbaden: Steiner), 1984.

⁷⁰ For the relations of *juntas* of *hermandades* and *Cortes*, see: Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades», 304–315.

⁷¹ Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, «Lignages, bandos et partis dans la vie politique des villes castillanes (xiv^e–xv^e siècles)», in *Les Sociétés urbaines en France méridionale et en péninsule Ibérique au Moyen Âge*, ed by Département de recherches «Pyrenéica», Université de Pau et des pays de l'Adour (Paris: CNRS, 1991), 105–130; Del Val Valdivieso, «Los bandos», 249–293; María Concepción Quintanilla, «Sociabilidad nobiliaria y solidaridad jerárquica en la Castilla del siglo xv», *Cuadernos de Historia de España* 76 (2000): 155–184; María Jesús Torreblanca Gaspar, «Sistemas de guerra, sistemas de paz: Los bandos en el Aragón de la Edad Media», in *Violencia y conflictividad en la sociedad de la España bajomedieval*, ed by Universidad de Zaragoza, Departamento de Historia Medieval [...] (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 1995), 101–120; José Ramón Díaz de Durana, «Violencia, disenso y conflicto en la sociedad vasca durante la Baja Edad Media. La lucha de bandos: Estado de la cuestión de un problema historiográfico», *ibid.*, 27–58.

la paz del rey, and the imperial peace in the Empire, the rhetoric of imperial diets and *Cortes*⁷² and the Castilian kings and the kings of the Romans and emperors showed remarkable similarities: in the 1470s, the establishment of durable peace-keeping measures was a common aim of the monarchs of both countries and closely linked to the matter of peace, justice and the reform of the kingdom. In the Medieval Empire, the end of the 15th century saw the efforts of Emperor Frederick III against feuds (for example the *Reformatio Friderici* of 1442) and the reform legislation of Maximilian I with the foundation of the *Reichskammergericht*, the ‘Eternal Peace’ (*Ewiger Landfrieden*) and the ‘Common Penny’ (*Gemeiner Pfennig*) in 1495⁷³. In the peace-keeping system of the Empire, regional alliance systems played a central role. A first type were urban leagues.

2.2. Urban leagues and *Landfrieden*

Between the most important urban leagues of the 13th–15th centuries were⁷⁴:

- The League of the towns of the Rhine Valley (*Rheinischer [Städte-]bund*, 1254–1257) and more regional urban leagues:
- The *Wetterauischer Städtebund*, several times prolonged (1285–1364, Frankfurt, Friedberg, Wetzlar, Gelnhausen);
- The leagues of Saxony / Westphalia *Ladbergener Bund* (1246, Münster, Osnabrück, Herford, Minden and Coesfeld); *Werner Bund* (1253, Dortmund, Soest, Münster, Osnabrück, Minden, Lippstadt and Paderborn)⁷⁵;

⁷² Óscar López Gómez, «La paz y el rey en los cuadernos de las Cortes de Castilla (siglos XIV–XV). Léxico político y argumentación retórica», *En la España Medieval*, 44 (2021): 127–168.

⁷³ About the historiography of the *Reichsreform* see, Gisela Naegle, «De la réformation à la Réforme: l’historiographie de la “Reichsreform”». In *Reformatio?*, ed. by Marie Dejoux, 277–294 (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2023). Accessed March 21, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.porsorbonne.112406>. Peter Moraw, *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung, 1250–1490* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin: Propyläen, 1985). For the efforts to criminalise feuds, see: Julia Eulenstein, Christine Reinle and Michael Rothmann, eds., *Fehdeführung im spätmittelalterlichen Reich* (Affalterbach: Didymos, 2013); Eberhard Isenmann, «Warum wurde die Fehde im römisch-deutschen Reich seit 1467 reichsgesetzlich verboten? Der Diskurs über Fehde, Friede und Gewaltmonopol im 15. Jahrhundert», *ibid.*, 335–474; Christine Reinle, «Legitimation und Delegitimierung von Fehden in juristischen und theologischen Diskursen des Spätmittelalters», in *Frieden schaffen und sich verteidigen im Spätmittelalter / Faire la paix et se défendre à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed. by Gisela Naegle (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 83–122.

⁷⁴ Short summary: Bernhard Kreutz, «Städtebünde (Mittelalter/Frühe Neuzeit)», in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*. Accessed March 31, 2025. [http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Städtebünde_\(Mittelalter/Frühe_Neuzeit\)](http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Städtebünde_(Mittelalter/Frühe_Neuzeit)) and the map: «Geschichtskarte Städtebünde im Spätmittelalter» [Urban leagues at the end of the Middle Ages]: Source: supplementary material of the school book *Geschichte und Geschehen. Antike und Mittelalter (Oberstufe)*, Klett-Verlag, Stuttgart. Accessed March 31, 2025. https://www2.klett.de/sixcms/media.php/229/430035_k10_karte_staedte_ma.pdf.

⁷⁵ About the *Ladbergener* and the *Werner Bund*, see the map: «Städtebünde des 13. Jahrhunderts in Westfalen [published in 1955]», Landschaftsverband Westfalen-Lippe [LWL] / LWL-Institut für westfälische Regionalgeschichte, Internet-Portal ‘Westfälische Geschichte’. Accessed March 31, 2025. https://www.lwl.org/westfaelische-geschichte/portal/Internet/input_felder/anzeigen.php?verzeichnis=kar&dateiname=kar100.gif&bild_id=100. List with explanations also in Naegle, «Défendre la ville», 38–39.

- The league of the towns of Thuringia (*Thüringischer Dreistädtebund*) 1304/1306 (Erfurt, Mühlhausen, Nordhausen); last prolongation for 12 years in 1469⁷⁶.
- The League of the *Oberlausitzer Städtebund*: Zittau, Görlitz, Lauban / Luban, Bautzen, Löbau, Kamenz, first league in 1346⁷⁷;
- The league of Swabian towns (*Schwäbischer Städtebund*, since 1298 for about 200 years, up to 31 member towns)⁷⁸;
- Several leagues in Franconia: several Franconian towns (ex. Nuremberg) also participated in the Swabian leagues;
- The Alsatian *Décapole* (1342: seven towns⁷⁹; reactivated in 1354 at the demand of Charles IV: Wissembourg, Haguenau, Rosheim, Obernai, Séléstat, Kaysersberg, Colmar, Munster, Türckheim, Mulhouse)⁸⁰;
- The League of towns of the Lake of Constance: since 1390 and again since 1393: Constance, Lindau, St. Gallen, Ravensburg, Überlingen, Wangen and Buchhorn, with slight variations – middle of the 15th century⁸¹.

Many of the urban members of such leagues were imperial or free towns, but sometimes urban leagues were even concluded on the level of a principality. Charles IV is an example of an emperor who prohibited certain kinds of leagues⁸², for example in the art. 15 of the Golden Bull (1356), one of the fundamental laws

⁷⁶ Mathias Kälble, «Stadt, Adel und Reich – Städtische Bündnispolitik in Thüringen bis zu den Anfängen des Dreistädtebundes (1304/1306)», in *Kaiser, Reich und Reichsstadt in der Interaktion*, ed. by Thomas Lau and Helge Wittmann (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2016), 13–40; Werner Mägdefrau, *Thüringer Städte und Städtebünde im Mittelalter* (Bad Langensalza, Rockstuhl, 2002); *id.*, *Der Thüringer Städtebund im Mittelalter* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1977).

⁷⁷ Alexandra Kaar, «Der Oberlausitzer Sechsstädtebund vom 14. bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts», in *Städtebünde. Zum Phänomen innerstädtischer Vergemeinschaftung von Antike bis Gegenwart*, ed. by Ferdinand Opl and Andreas Weigl (Innsbruck, Vienne: Studien Verlag, 2017), 157–186.

⁷⁸ Alexander Schubert, «Schwäbischer Städtebund», in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*. Accessed March 31, 2025. https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Schwäbischer_Städtebund

⁷⁹ Odile Kammerer, «Réseaux de villes et conscience urbaine (milieu XIII^e siècle-milieu XIV^e siècle)», *Francia Moyen Âge* 25, n.° 1 (1998): 172, note 216.

⁸⁰ Odile Kammerer, «Réseaux de villes...»; see also: Lucien Sittler, *La Décapole alsacienne des origines à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Strasbourg: Le Roux, 1955); Bernard Vogler, ed., *La Décapole. Dix villes d'Alsace alliées pour leurs libertés (1354-1679)* (Strasbourg: Éditions La Nuée bleue, 2009); Olivier Richard, «La Décapole dans l'historiographie du Rhin supérieur», in *Lignes urbaines et espace à la fin du Moyen Âge / Städtebünde und Raum im Spätmittelalter*, ed. by Laurence Buchholzer and Olivier Richard (Strasbourg, Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2012), 105–119.

⁸¹ Hartmut Semmler, «Städtebünde als Selbstbehauptungsstrategie – die Bodenseestädte Buchhorn und Überlingen im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert», in *Kaiser, Reich und Reichsstadt in der Interaktion*, ed. by Thomas Lau and Helge Wittmann (Petersberg, Michael Imhof Verlag), 50; Jörg Füchtner, *Die Bündnisse der Bodenseestädte bis zum Jahre 1390* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

⁸² Golden Bull, Art. 15 prohibits «detestandas pretere et sacris legibus reprobatae conspirationes et conventiculas seu colligationes illicitas in civitatibus et extra vel intra civitatem et civitatem, inter personam et personam sive inter personam et civitatem pretextu parentele seu receptionis in cives vel alterius cuiuscumque coloris, coniurationes insuper et confederationes et pacta necnon et consuetudinem circa huiusmodi introductam». Leagues that were founded with authorization of the town lord and/or for the sake of peace were permitted. (*Die Goldene Bulle*, January, 10 and December 25, 1356, edition in [CHARLES IV]. *Die Goldene Bulle Kaiser Karls IV. vom Jahre 1356*, ed. by Wolfgang D. Fritz. (Weimar: Böhlau, 1972–1978) (MGH Constitutiones, vol. 11), 535–633, here: 600.

of the medieval Empire⁸³, but at the same time, when it served his interests, he tried to promote the conclusion of alliances. Once more, this shows a parallel to the prohibitions of certain types of leagues by the Castilian kings John I (1390), Henry III (1393) and their successors⁸⁴. As in the German case, especially in situations of struggles for the throne, kings encouraged leagues when they served and strengthened their own interests, but after the consolidation of their power, they saw them as potential danger and prohibited or dissolved them (see the examples above). This type of ordinance was promulgated for *paz e concordia e buen sosiego* of the subjects. In 1393, in spite of their potential dangers, Henry III did not want to prohibit leagues that fostered the preservation of peace⁸⁵.

In the Holy Roman Empire, the *Landfrieden* (regional peace) of Augsburg, Ulm, Memmingen and twenty-six other towns is an example of this policy (November 7, 1356, prolongation of the *Landfrieden* until April 1358). The treaty explicitly states that its conclusion was an initiative of the emperor and establishes a regional organization. It previews a regional organization in three sub-societies (*Gesellschaften*) that, nevertheless, shall form «all together one unique alliance and *landfried*» (...und doch alle mitainander die ainen puntnuzz und den ainen landfryd halten suln und wellen)⁸⁶. The first of them should unite Augsburg, Memmingen, Kempten, Kaufbeuren, Werde, Nördlingen, Dinkelsbühl and Bopfingen, the second Biberach, Ravensburg, Lindau, Buchhorn, Überlingen, Pfullendorf, Konstanz, Sankt Gallen, Schaffhausen, Leutkirch and Wangen (mostly towns in the larger region of the Lake of Constance), the third Esslingen, Reutlingen, Gemünd, Hall, Heilbronn, Rottweil, Wimpfen and Weinsberg (Swabian towns)⁸⁷. All of them were towns that were immediate to the Empire. In case of violation of the *Landfrieden*, there were two stages of measures: in minor events, when a town could not handle the problem by itself, it should turn first to the geographically closest member or members (*der nehesten stet*) and only in case that this would not be sufficient, an assembly in a conveniently situated place should be summoned and the concerned member or members could address themselves to ‘the other societies of the closest neighbour towns’ (*den andern gesellschaften der nehesten stet*)⁸⁸.

⁸³ About this text, see: Ulrike Hohensee et al., eds., *Die Goldene Bulle. Politik – Wahrnehmung – Rezeption*. 2 vol. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2009).

⁸⁴ González Arce, José Damián, *Gremios y cofradías en los reinos medievales de León y Castilla. Siglos XII-XV* (Palencia: Región, 2009), 24-25; John I., Cortes de Guadalajara, 1390, in *Cortes de los antiguos reinos de León y de Castilla*, ed. Real Academia de la Historia, vol. 2 (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1863), n.º XXXIV, 424-442, here art. 2, 426. For what follows and the comparison of the terminology of communes / commoners etc., see: Gisela Naegle and Jesús Ángel Solórzano Telechea, «Geschlechter und Zünfte, principales und común. Städtische Konflikte in Kastilien und dem spätmittelalterlichen Reich», *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 41, n.º 4 (2014): 561-618.

⁸⁵ «Pero por esto nonentiendo defender las buenas amistades por que todos sean amigos e biuan en paz e en buena amistad». (Henry III., Cortes de Madrid, 1393, in *Cortes*, vol. 2, n.º XLII, 524-532, quotation without article, 530).

⁸⁶ MGH Const. vol. 11, n.º 821, 459-461.

⁸⁷ MGH Const. vol. 11, n.º 821, November 1356, 459.

⁸⁸ MGH Const., vol. 11, n.º 821, 460.

Again, this shows a parallel to the Castilian case: towns who were not able to handle a security problem by themselves should turn to the two closest neighbour towns and their officials of the *hermandad* (for example chapter XX, *cuaderno* of Medina del Campo, 1466)⁸⁹.

As urban complaints about a continuous lack of solidarity and other documents from the first *Städtekrieg* (1387–1389)⁹⁰ show, in Germany, some towns as Nuremberg were not satisfied with the aid of other members of the urban leagues. One of its most important political motives was the potential danger to their trade activities. As a town whose richness was mainly based on far distance trade, for Nuremberg, war could be disastrous and it had much more to lose than other towns. Staying inside the league without sufficient help from fellow towns would be «...much more difficult for us than for another town that does not have so many merchants and who does not have so much to lose, and by now, we have suffered very great damage because of the war»⁹¹. In the *Markgrafenkrieg* of 1449/1450, Erhard Schürstab, who is held for the author or compiler of a war report of Nuremberg, was also disappointed by the lack of urban solidarity and gives examples of the omission of help by urban allies⁹². Geographical proximity and common interests were crucial for the cohesion of urban leagues.

In the Castilian case, for the *Hermandad General*, we can observe similar phenomena: several dispositions of *cuadernos* deal with the problem of towns that were not willing to enter into the *Hermandad General*, with the discussion of possible sanctions of this attitude (as economic measures of boycott, exclusion from protection provided by the forces of the organization, etc.). Some other *cuadernos* also contain dispositions about the unwillingness of towns and their officials to fulfil their duties of help (when they had been summoned to help other members) and indications about these summons procedures⁹³.

Regional peace unions were an instrument in order to secure peace in certain areas, but if they got too extended, their members were no longer ready to contribute actively to the common charges⁹⁴. After the first «War of the Towns» (*Erster Städtekrieg*) that implied more than 70 towns and that was already lost by the urban party, Mainz, Worms and Speyer from the Rhine Valley wanted Nuremberg to contribute to the high financial reparation due to the

⁸⁹ Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades», 320–321; edition: 343.

⁹⁰ Schubert, «Schwäbischer Städtebund...».

⁹¹ Letter of the Council of Nuremberg to Berthold Beheim in Ulm, September 1, 1388, in Hegel, Karl, ed., *Die Chroniken der deutschen Städte vom 14. bis ins 16. Jahrhundert. Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte: Nuremberg*, vol. 1. (Leipzig: Hirzel: 1862), Beilage n.º11, 156.

⁹² For example: Nürnberg, Hegel, Karl, ed., *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte: Nuremberg*. (Leipzig: Hirzel: 1864), vol. 2, 128; 157.

⁹³ Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades», 320–321.

⁹⁴ Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades», 320–321; Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales», 106–108. About the spatial limits of urban solidarity in the medieval Empire, see: Regula Schmid, «‘Vorbehalt’ und ‘Hilfskreis’: Grenzsetzungen in kommunalen Bündnissen des Spätmittelalters», in *Die Grenzen des Netzwerks (1200–1600)*, ed. by Kerstin Hitzbleck and Klara Hübner (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2014), 175–195.

Count Palatine. Nuremberg refused such an extended financial responsibility for reparations to the princely winners. It was only ready to pay its own part-but not to pay more and supplementary charges for other former allies or for the Swabian towns. So, the former allies brought their quarrel before King Wenceslas, who, in July 1398 when he was in Nuremberg, participated personally in the negotiations. His efforts were in vain, to achieve an amiable arrangement (*minne*) proved to be impossible. So, in the end, the parties had to turn to a judicial decision (*Rechtstag*)⁹⁵.

A deliberation / decision (*Ratschlag*) issued by an assembly of free and imperial towns in Nuremberg (1444) provides another striking example. Confronted with the danger of foreign troops from France and elsewhere (*dem Welschen und fremden volk*) the towns spoke of «very big frightening events» (*große swer erschrockenliche leuffe*) that the assembled towns had taken to their hearts (*zu hertzen genommen*). They wanted to defend themselves and the interests of the Empire and give each other «help, comfort and assistance»⁹⁶. But the great distances were seen as a problem and they proposed to organize regional subsystems. All towns should assemble and deliberate: the Rhenish towns, the towns of the Netherlands, the towns of the region of the Lake of Constance (who already had their own league) and the league of Ulm (that was explicitly mentioned as such). All of them should do so for their own respective regions. Therefore, Cologne should write to Aachen, Frankfurt, Mainz, Worms and Speyer. Straßburg should write to Colmar and other Alsatian imperial cities who should come together in Worms. Constance should write to the towns of the region of the Lake of Constance. Ulm should do so for the towns of its own league and also to Regensburg, Nuremberg, Weissenburg and Windsheim-and all those towns should unite in Ulm⁹⁷.

In the Spanish case, there was also a kind of network of (sometimes overlapping) *hermandades* in Castile, León⁹⁸, Galicia, Andalusia, Extremadura, Asturias⁹⁹, etc. and, in the form of the *Hermandades Generales*, an organization in form of provinces which were represented at the common assemblies (*juntas*)¹⁰⁰. In the *Hermandad General* signed in the *Cortes* of Burgos in 1315, there were nine subdivisions that should realize distinct *juntas*. In 1315, there should be separated assemblies of Castile and Toledo with their Extremaduras, and the biannual assemblies of León, Galicia and Asturias. The latter should take place one year in León, and in the next year in Benavente¹⁰¹. As in the German case,

⁹⁵ Rad, 'Minne...', 54-58.

⁹⁶ Johannes Janssen, ed., *Frankfurts Reichsrespondenz nebst verwandten Aktenstücken* von 1376-1519 (Freiburg [im Breisgau]: Herder), vol. 2/1, 1872; n.º 98, 71.

⁹⁷ Janssen, ed., *Frankfurts Reichsrespondenz...*, vol. 2/1, 1872; n.º 98, 71.

⁹⁸ César González Mínguez, «Hermandades concejiles y orden público en Castilla y León durante la Edad Media», *Clío & Crimen* 3 (2006): 13-35; Luis Suárez Fernández, «Evolución histórica de las Hermandades Castellanas», *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, 16 (1951): 5-78.

⁹⁹ Eloy Benito Ruano, *Hermandades en Asturias durante la Edad Media: Discurso de ingreso en el Instituto de Estudios Asturianos* (Oviedo: Imprenta La Cruz, 1972).

¹⁰⁰ Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales.», 103-106.

¹⁰¹ Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales», 97.

some cities claimed to play a special role as chief and capital and to act as a kind of secretary, as Burgos and León (see, for example chapter 38, *cuaderno* of Fuensalida, 1466)¹⁰².

In ancient research, authors often made a difference between urban leagues and regional peace unions, but recent studies have questioned this perspective. In both cases, the goals could be similar: the preservation of peace and security, the consolidation of government and the joint defence against a common adversary. In the case of the Holy Roman Empire, regional leagues, alliances and *Landfrieden* were also a response to the great geographical extension and represent attempts to handle the peace and security problem by creating collective regional subsystems (as was still the case for the ideas of *Reichskreis-Organisation*, even under the reign of Emperor Charles V)¹⁰³.

Some big towns as Nuremberg, Ulm or Frankfurt played a prominent role in the security, military defence and diplomatic and juridical representation of their respective regions. Often, their elites were closely connected and Nuremberg or Frankfurt also represented smaller towns like Weißenburg or Windsheim or Friedberg at imperial diets or in the form of common embassies to the emperor or king¹⁰⁴. In contrast to other imperial cities, Nuremberg lead for a long time a policy of «splendid isolation» and concluded alliances with the smaller towns in its surroundings. In 1427, the three towns of Nuremberg, Windsheim and Weißenburg concluded, for the first time, an alliance of two years in order to assure the security of their surrounding area and the imperial streets. In 1429, 1432, 1434 and 1443, it was extended for two or three years¹⁰⁵. The treaty of Nuremberg, Windsheim and Weißenburg of September 29, 1472, is another good example for an emotional terminology of such associations. It was concluded against the insecurity of the imperial street, which caused severe unlawful damages to the partner towns¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰² Martín Romera, «Hermanas desiguales», 105.

¹⁰³ Horst Carl, «Landfrieden als Konzept und Realität kollektiver Sicherheit im Heiligen Römischen Reich», in *Frieden schaffen und sich verteidigen im Spätmittelalter/Faire la paix et se défendre à la fin du Moyen Âge*, ed by Gisela Naegle (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012), 130, 136. Accessed March, 31, 2025. https://perspectivia.net/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/ploneimport_derivate_00011814/PHS%2098%20-%20carl_landfrieden.pdf. See also: Winfried Dotzauer, *Die deutschen Reichskreise (1383-1806)* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998); Wolfgang Wüst, and Michael Müller, eds., *Reichskreise und Regionen im frühmodernen Europa. Horizonte und Grenzen im spatial turn* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin: Lang, 2011).

¹⁰⁴ About small imperial towns at imperial diets, see: Gabriele Annas, «Kleinere Reichsstädte und die Reichsversammlungen des späten Mittelalters – eine Spurensuche», in *Kleine Reichsstädte*, ed. by Olivier Richard, Helge Wittmann and Gabriel Zeilinger (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2024), 345-378.

¹⁰⁵ Reinhard Seyboth, «Politik-Information-Kommunikation. Nürnberg und seine Beziehungen zu den fränkischen Reichsstädten im späten Mittelalter», in *Städtebünde und städtische Außenpolitik. Träger, Instrumentarien und Konflikte während des hohen und späten Mittelalters*, ed. by Roland Deigendesch and Christian Jörg (Ostfildern: Thorbecke, 2019), 242.

¹⁰⁶ «Einung der Reichstädte Nürnberg, Windsheim und Weißenburg auf drei Jahre», September, 29, 1472, in Seyboth, «Politik», 257-259, here: 257: «we considered this carefully and we took it to our heart, and because we want to preserve ourselves better for the Holy Empire and stay with it, we, with good intentions and prudent courage, in first line to the praise of the Almighty God and of Mary the Queen of Heaven, to the honour of our most merciful Lord, his most serene Highness, prince and Lord Frede-

Many peace associations (*Landfriedensbünde*) also had non-urban members, but in the long run, the greater the extension of a league was, the greater was the danger of its rupture. Towns and princes could conclude multiple alliances. For example, in the year 1451, Count Palatine Frederick I made alliance treaties with the count of Veldenz, the dukes of Bavaria-Munich and Bavaria-Landshut, the bishop of Würzburg, the towns of Speyer and Wimpfen (individually) and, collectively, with the towns of Ulm, Reutlingen, Weil, Kempten, Giengen and Aalen¹⁰⁷.

3. Case studies: Comparing the incomparable? Urban Leagues, *Landfriedensbünde* and the Hansa

3.1. Urban Leagues in the Rhine Valley, the Wetterau and Swabia

Often, especially for urban leagues and alliances, at their foundation, contracts also established procedures for mediation and conflict resolution. One of the most important urban leagues was the league of the Rhenish towns of 1254 (*Rheinischer Städtebund*) with more than 60 urban members. In fact, it had a mixed composition that also included the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne and Trier and more than 30 noblemen¹⁰⁸. Due to its huge extension, its members had very divergent interests¹⁰⁹. In the Rhine-Main-Region, the *Wetterauischer Städtebund* of Frankfurt, Friedberg, Wetzlar and Gelnhausen was renewed several times (1285–1364). As to the dynasties, especially less powerful princes as the kings Adolf von Nassau (*ca. 1250–†1298) and Ruprecht von der Pfalz (*1352–†1410)¹¹⁰ were implied in local conflicts and feuds in the same way as other local princes. In the Swabian League of 1488, the king of the Romans was a member like others. Local security was assured by a complicated system of overlapping and intertwined leagues and alliances, particularly the regional peace unions, that took the form of contracts that were concluded for a predetermined duration of several years and that had to be renewed and regularly renegotiated. The attitude of the emperors towards such leagues and alliances was variable, sometimes they prohibited them,¹¹¹

rick III, Roman Emperor and of the Holy Empire, in order to respect all their rights and to fulfil them, without endangering them, for our own profit and the profit of our common land, for the sake of peace and the maintenance of such *friendship* as will be declared below, we have united us, we unite and join us together by this document». (My own translation and highlighting).

¹⁰⁷ Hardy, *Associative Political Culture...*, 93.

¹⁰⁸ Bönnen, «Der Rheinische Bund», 13–35.

¹⁰⁹ About these spatial limits of urban solidarity, see: Schmid, «‘Vorbehalt’...», 175–195.

¹¹⁰ Oliver Auge and Karl-Heinz Spieß, «Ruprecht (1400–1410)», in *Die deutschen Herrscher des Mittelalters*, ed. by Bernd Schneidmüller and Stefan Weinfurter (Munich, Beck, 2003), 446–461.

¹¹¹ Prohibition: Henry (VII, reg. 1220–1235). (Bernhard Kreutz, «Städtebünde (Mittelalter/Frühe Neuzeit)» (2011), in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*. Accessed March 31, 2025. [http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Städtebünde_\(Mittelalter/Frühe_Neuzeit\)](http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Städtebünde_(Mittelalter/Frühe_Neuzeit))

and sometimes, when they served their own dynastic interests, they encouraged them¹¹².

For example, in February 1368, Charles IV set up a peace union for four years in the region between Bingen and Andernach, which also covered the region of Gelnhausen, Aschaffenburg, Heidelberg, Speyer, Kaiserslautern, Trier, etc. Its members included the archbishops Gerlach of Mainz and Cuno of Trier, two *Rheinpfalzgrafen* and the towns of Mainz, Worms, Speyer, Frankfurt, Oppenheim, Friedberg, Wetzlar, Gelnhausen and Kaiserslautern¹¹³. In the same document, he established a commission of nine men who were responsible for the realization of this peace and who could judge people that were accused of breaking it. Each of the two archbishops and the two noblemen together should send one man and another, whom they all had elected in common, Mainz, Worms and Speyer should respectively send one man, and the three towns of Frankfurt, Oppenheim, Wetzlar and Gelnhausen another man. The ninth member was the Count Henry of Veldenz, appointed by the emperor. The members should meet and judge regularly¹¹⁴. In 1381, Mainz, Worms, Speyer, Frankfurt, Straßburg, Hagenau and Wissembourg concluded an alliance that, in 1386, was completed by Wetzlar, Friedberg, Gelnhausen and Pfeddersheim (Rhein-Main-Gebiet / Wetterau); Seltz, Obernai, Sélestat (Alsace) and eight lords from the Rhine Valley. In 1381, this league united itself with the league of the Swabian towns (of 1376) and formed the Rhenish-Swabian League (*Rheinisch-schwäbischer Städtebund*)¹¹⁵. These towns were linked by the Rhine and its tributaries (*Nebenflüsse*) as important trade routes, for example, for wine¹¹⁶.

3.2. The Swabian League (*Schwäbischer Bund*, 1488-1534)

For the *Landfriedensbünde* of the Holy Roman Empire, which also had urban members, we can observe extended forms of cooperation between the different orders of a region in the form of assemblies and common actions with the participation of clerics and noblemen. The Swabian League was founded in 1488 by Emperor Frederick III (reign as king of the Romans 1440-1493, emperor

¹¹² Bernhard Kreutz, «Rheinische Städtebünde (13./14. Jahrhundert)» (2009), in *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*. Accessed 31 March, 2025. [https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Rheinische_Staetebuende_\(13./14._Jahrhundert\)](https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Rheinische_Staetebuende_(13./14._Jahrhundert))

¹¹³ Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz, ed., *Regesta Imperii Online*: RI VIII n. 4593, Accessed March, 31, 2025. http://www.regesta-imperii.de/id/1368-02-02_1_0_8_0_0_5000_4593

¹¹⁴ Konrad Ruser, ed., *Die Urkunden und Akten der oberdeutschen Städtebünde vom 13. Jahrhundert bis 1549*, 3 vol. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979-2005), vol. II/2, n.° 930, 915.

¹¹⁵ Map: «Der Rheinische Städtebund von 1254 (Entwurf Gerhard Baaken)», in *Großer Historischer Weltatlas. 2. Teil: Mittelalter*. (Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch Verlag, 1979, p. 70a).

¹¹⁶ Map: *Geschichtskarte Städtebünde im Spätmittelalter* [urban leagues at the end of the Middle Ages]: Source: supplementary material of the school book *Geschichte und Geschehen. Antike und Mittelalter (Oberstufe)*, Klett-Verlag. Accessed March 31, 2025. https://www2.klett.de/sixcms/media.php/229/430035_k10_karte_staedte_ma.pdf.

since 1452). This organization was tributary to two older types of association. It was at the same time a continuation of medieval territorial leagues of peace (*Landfriedensbünde*) and of regional corporative traditions for the preservation of peace that for Swabian towns and noblemen already had a long tradition. This league of 'mixed' composition united at the same time, and this was its decisive new element, imperial towns and noble associations, as the societies of Saint-Georges. In the first place, the association was founded for eight years and it was meant as an instrument to keep up the Imperial Peace of Frankfurt (*Frankfurter Reichslandfrieden*) of 1486. From the viewpoint of Frederick III, it was also an instrument to unite the regional powers that supported the dynasty of Habsburg and a means to reinforce his family's influence in one of the central regions of the Empire. The new organization developed its own dynamic and was able to attract powerful princes and territories: Tyrolia (where since 1490, the territorial lord was Frederick's son Maximilian the king of the Romans), Württemberg, the archbishops of Trier and Mainz and the margraves of Franconia and Baden¹¹⁷. In its final period (1523–1534), the Swabian League not only comprehended the Swabian towns and a part of the nobility of the region but also all important territories of Upper Germany (*Oberdeutschland*)¹¹⁸. Since 1500, it was organized in the form of three 'benches' (princes, nobility and towns)¹¹⁹. It also had a mandatory court of arbitrage (*obligatorisches Schiedsgericht*). The League also intervened in conflicts led by exterior parties: the Bavarian Wittelsbach (1492), the duke Ulrich of Württemberg (1519), knights from Franconia who led feuds (1523) and the revolted peasants of the Peasants' War (1525)¹²⁰. In the first period (1488–1496), the league had 26 urban members (Ulm, Esslingen, Reutlingen, Überlingen, Lindau, Schwäbisch Hall, Nördlingen, Memmingen, Ravensburg, Schwäbisch Gmünd, Biberach, Dinkelsbühl, Pfullendorf, Kempten, Kaufbeuren, Isny, Leutkirch, Giengen, Wangen, Aalen, Weil der Stadt, Bopfingen, November: Augsburg, Heilbronn, Wimpfen, Donauwörth)¹²¹. But in general, German urban leagues and *Landfriedensbünde* and, in contrast to the Swiss Confederation, also the Swabian League were only concluded for a limited time and the negotiations for its prolongation proved to be long and difficult. In 1496, 1500, 1512 and 1523, they were successful. These negotiations created the opportunity to accept new members or for existing members to retreat themselves. So, the membership fluctuated and was less stable than in the Swiss case. The *Hermmandades Generales* also aspired to the stability of their composition: several dispositions tried to make the membership of all towns mandatory and to attract new members. In the case of the *cuaderno* of the *Santa Hermandad* of Castile and León of Fuensalida, 1466, it was prohibited to leave the league¹²². The terminology of leagues, associations and

¹¹⁷ Summary of Carl, «Landfrieden als Konzept», 121–138.

¹¹⁸ Map «Bundesstände 1523–1534», in Carl, «Landfrieden als Konzept», 138.

¹¹⁹ Carl, *ibid.*, 128.

¹²⁰ Carl, *Der Schwäbische Bund...*, 431–496.

¹²¹ Carl, *Der Schwäbische Bund...*, 62.

¹²² Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermmandades y Comunidades», 320–321; 325–326; edition of the text of the prohibition: chapter 4, p. 362.

hermandades implies the idea of a certain equality and of horizontal relations that were strongly expressed in their early phase. Nevertheless, later, those organizations and the Swabian League changed a lot. From a rather corporative institution of collective preservation of peace, it got an instrument that was more and more controlled by the king and the princes. Finally, it could also be used for repression (as in the Peasants' war 1525).

3.3. The Hansa

The legal quality of the Hansa is still discussed lively by modern historiography. Often it is not seen as an urban league. This kind of question was already formulated by contemporary medieval jurists. In the second half of the 15th century, in the conflict of the Hansa with the English, it had some practical consequences for the right to retaliation and confiscation, for the collective responsibilities of the members of the Hansa, the compensation of damages, etc.¹²³. According to the English side, the Hansa was a *universitas*, a «societas, collegium, universitas seu unum corpus vulgariter nuncupatum Hanza Theutonica, que aggregata universaliter et constituta per mutuum consensum et confederationem diversarum civitatum, burgorum opidorum et villarum tamquam diversarum particularum communitatum, societatum et membrorum (ejusdem)»¹²⁴. The Hanseatic side refused these arguments because, contrary to the conditions of Roman and Canon law, it did not have collective possessions, a common seal, a common syndic, etc.¹²⁵ According to its own presentation, it was a community of interests, pursued commercial aims and organized a common defence against the risks of maritime trade as attacks of pirates. It was only a *firma confederatio*: «Non est igitur Ansa Theutonica societas, collegium vel universitas, sed est multarum civitatum, opidorum et communitatum firma confederatio, ut intercursus negociacionum terra ac mari votivum ac prosperum habeat successum, ut piratis, latronibus ac aliis predas terra ac mari agentibus resistencia denture oportuna, ne eorum insidiis negociatores bonis suis et mercibus spolientur»¹²⁶.

Nevertheless, depending on the respective political and juridical situation, the argumentation of the Hansa could also be variable and in its internal relations some

¹²³ For the difficulties of an appropriate historiographical description of the Hansa see: Philipp Höhn, «Pluralismus statt Homogenität», 261–290; Cordes, «Die Rechtsnatur der Hanse», 49–62.

¹²⁴ N.º 570, «Pro justificatione cujusdam sentencie late contra Hanzam Theutonicam per christianissimum ac serenissimum regem Anglie etc.» (March 29, 1469), in Walther Stein, ed., *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*, vol. 9 (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1903), 453–457, here 453.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, n.º 584 (before May 14, 1469), 462–474 here art. 1, 463: «Non est eciam universitas, quia ad hoc, quod aliqua communitas universitatis nomen mereatur, requiritur tam jure civili quam canonico, quod habeat res communes, communem archam, commune sigillum, commune syndicum et communem actorem, communia negocia gerentem, sed nullum illorum est reperire in Ansa Theutonica. Igitur non est universitas».

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, n.º 584 (art. 4), 464.

cities, as Lübeck had a stronger position than others. Members could be excluded or disciplined. From the viewpoint of the French king Louis XI (1483) and his son, this fact was explicitly recognized. He treated Lübeck as *princeps* that had the right to discipline disobedient member towns. As for the privileges he had granted to the Hansa, he was willing to adapt their benefits to these rules. If a town had revolted against the Hansa before it could benefit again from the granted privileges, it had to reconcile itself with the Hansa and only after Lübeck had informed the French king that the town had made its peace with the Hansa and that it had been compensated for possible damages, it could again use them. (art. 7)¹²⁷. In this part of the text, the Hansa is described as «*corpus*», «*communitas*» and «*liga*» and treated as the diplomatic partner of foreign relations. This text does not even mention the emperor¹²⁸. Written in Latin, it calls itself «*pax scilicet et concordia*», and is concluded between the King of France, his kingdom and his subjects (*inter nos regnumque dominia et subditos nostros*) and the urban governors and towns of the Hansa (*magnificos viros amicosque nostros precarissimos proconsules, consules, mercatores et incolas civitatum de Hansa Teutonica parte ex altera bellorum inducie seu treuge pacte et inite fuerint, ut tandem pax firma et perpetua sequerentur*)¹²⁹.

Recent research increasingly stresses common features of the Hansa and other alliances. The assemblies of the Hansa could also be used to re-establish peace and appease conflicts by extrajudicial means¹³⁰.

Again, there are some elements that can be compared with the Spanish case: the league of the harbour towns of Cantabria negotiated with foreign kings¹³¹ and the *cuadernos* issued by *hermandades* sometimes explicitly used the terminology of *universitas*, for example, «la Universitydad de la Santa Hermandad de los Reynos de Castilla y de León» (*cuaderno de Fuensalida*, 1466)¹³².

¹²⁷ «Preterea si casus contingeret aliquam seu aliquas ex principalioribus vel aliis predictae Hanse civitatibus et oppidis a corpore, communitate et liga eiusdem Hanse deficere seu aldermanis predictis rebellare esse postea quam ea de re a proconsulibus et mercatoribus civitatis Lubicensis, que ipsius lige obtinet principatum, necnon ab aldremendis predictis informati fuerimus, mercatores, naucleros aliosque earundem civitatum et oppidorum sic deficientium hac presenti pace et concordia allisque privilegiis et libertatibus per nos et predecessores nostros Francorum reges christianissimos eidem lige et communitati concessis nullatenus gaudere permittemus, quousque tamen ab eadem civitate Lubicensi certiores effecti fuerimus, eosdem sic deficientes eidem lige et communitati reconciliatos fuisse, eidemque de omnibus damnis, interesse et gravaminibus ab eisdem occasione ipsius defectionis perpensis et sustentis plene et integre satisfecerint» (Rolf Sprandel, ed., *Quellen zur Hanse-Geschichte* [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1982], n.º 19, art. 7, 242).

¹²⁸ Sprandel, ed., *Quellen...*, n.º 19, 242.

¹²⁹ Sprandel, ed., *Quellen...*, n.º 19, 236.

¹³⁰ See for example: Florian Dirks, «Streitschlichtung ohne Gericht? Zu Konfliktlösungsstrategien in Fehden zwischen Stadt und Adel auf Tagfahrten im Hanseraum des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts», in *Unter der Linde und vor dem Kaiser*, ed. by Anja Amend-Traut, Josef Bongartz et al. (Vienna, Böhlau, 2020), 145–162.

¹³¹ Solórzano Telechea, «Las Nereidas del Norte», 39–61.

¹³² Bermejo Cabrero, «Hermandades y Comunidades», 282–283; quotation 358.

4. Conclusions

The last-mentioned example of the Hansa that even concerns ‘international’ relations and politics shows the importance of collective actors as the Hansa for the external perception of towns. Collective actors and collective security systems played an important role in the preservation and re-establishment of peace and security, especially in the electoral monarchy of the Holy Roman Empire that was characterized by a strong territorial fragmentation. Its mechanisms could be effective but all depended on the good will of the members of urban leagues, *Landfriedensbünde* and other ‘mixed’ organizations as the Swabian League. On the level of a region, such leagues that were sometimes regularly renewed for a long time and could work well. But they had their limits: the most extended example, the League of the Rhenish towns of 1254, which had more than 60 urban members and more than 30 lords–fell rapidly apart: the geographic distance was too important and the interests of the members too different. The Swiss Confederation had found a solution to such problems, it developed a complex system of numerous different kinds of meetings that permitted to handle controversial topics at the lowest institutional levels. This reduced travel distances, costs and the time needed for the procedures themselves. The Swiss system also practised flexibility in its relationships with its neighbours, by integrating them on two levels, either as full cantons (until 1513) or as allies. The latter type of association could be annulled by both parties if necessary (as it was the case for Mülhausen/Alsace, Rottweil and Besançon) or merely suspended (Three Leagues in the Grisons and Valais). In contrast to this, the full cantons could not actually secede from the Confederation¹³³. The German leagues and associations did not reach a comparable level of stability. Nevertheless, in the 16th century, even the emperor tested supplementary ways of organizing peace by leagues and different forms of regional organizations as the *Reichskreise* (‘Imperial circles’)¹³⁴. Thus, the empire was a huge laboratory of different methods and measures of peace-making and conflict resolution¹³⁵.

Making collective security and peace systems work was a difficult enterprise. In this context contractual horizontal relations that were based on contracts and oaths played a decisive role. Conflict appeasement was also achieved at assemblies of various types – the latter often had multiple functions¹³⁶ and therefore, studies that compare different types of assemblies and peace-keeping institutions or leagues

¹³³ Würzler, «The League», 34–35.

¹³⁴ Voker Press, «Die Bundespläne Kaiser Karls V. und die Reichsverfassung» (1982), in *id.*, *Das Alte Reich*, 2^e ed. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000).

¹³⁵ On conflict resolution methods in Europe, see: David von Mayenburg, ed., *Handbuch zur Geschichte der Konfliktlösung in Europa*, vol. 2: *Mittelalter* (Berlin: Springer, 2021).

¹³⁶ As an examples, see: Duncan Hardy, «Vom Schiedstag zum Reichstag. Versuch einer Typologie des ‘Tagungsspektrums’ aus konzeptioneller und funktioneller Sicht im Heiligen Römischen Reich ca. 1350–1550», in *Kollektive Willensbildung in der Vormoderne*, ed. by Angela Huang and Christian Link (Wismar: Callidus, 2024), 2–37.

inside and outside the Holy Roman Empire should be deepened and extended. This applies particularly to the comparison with the Spanish *hermandades*. For both cases it would also be interesting to explore and compare the question of the relations of representative and other assemblies (*Reichstage*, *Städtetage*, *Cortes*), peace-keeping measures and urban leagues, *hermandades* and *Landfriedensbünde*.

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