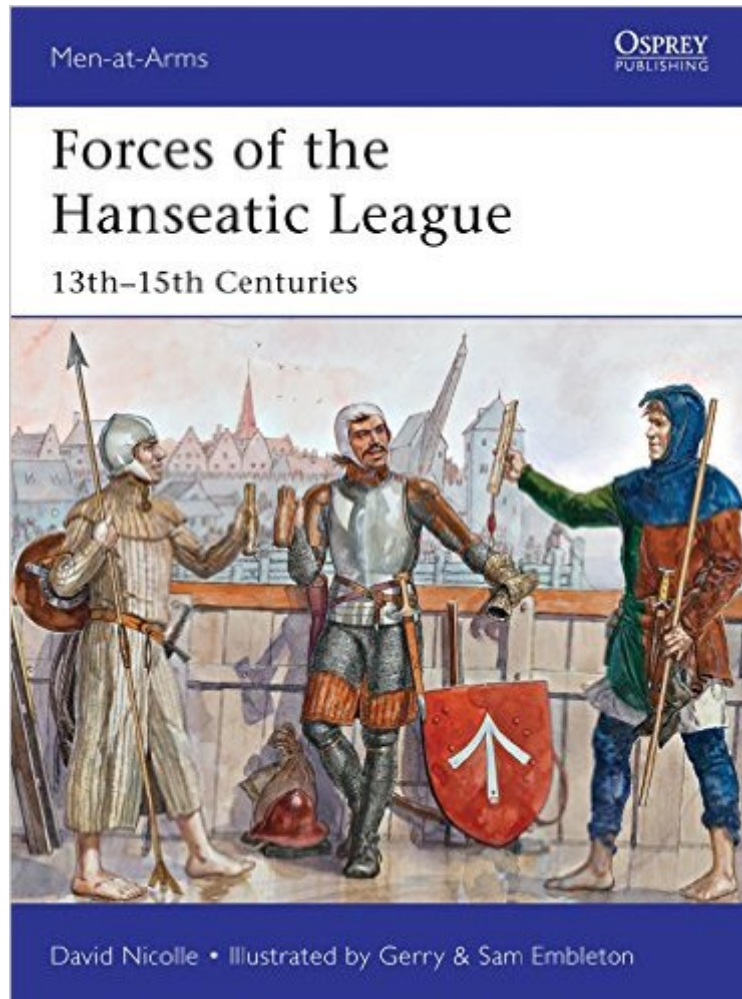


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# Forces Of The Hanseatic League: 13th-15th Centuries (Men-at-Arms)



## Synopsis

The famous but largely unchronicled Hanseatic League (or simple "the Hanse/Hansa") was a Teutonic German commercial and defensive federation of merchant guilds based in harbor towns along the North Sea and Baltic coasts of what are now Germany and her neighbors, which eventually dominated maritime trade in Northern Europe and spread its influence much further afield. The League was formed to protect the economic and political interests of member cities throughout a vast and complex trading network. While most members remained basically subject to the local rulers who profited from their prosperity, in a sense the League might be seen as foreshadowing today's ambiguous relationship between global corporations and political nation states. The League continued to operate well into the 17th century, but its golden age was between c. 1200 and c. 1500; thereafter it failed to take full advantage of the wave of maritime exploration to the west, south and east of Europe. During its 300 years of dominance the League's large ships - called "cogs" - were at the forefront of maritime technology, were early users of cannon, and were manned by strong fighting crews to defend them from pirates in both open-sea and river warfare. The home cities raised their own armies for mutual defence, and their riches both allowed them, and required them, to invest in fortifications and gunpowder weapons, since as very attractive targets they were subjected to sieges at various times.

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## Customer Reviews

This was a very interesting subject to choose, if only because the Hanseatic League of (mostly)

German-speaking towns and cities of Northern Europe (and not only those in actual Germany) lasted some three hundred years and was the powerful guild of merchants and traders during the Middle Ages in Western Europe. It is therefore that much more disappointing to see it so poorly treated. The topic covered is of interest because there is not a great deal published in English on the topic and what little there is often made of reprints of older books translated into English, such as Dollinger's *The German Hansa* (1970), listed by David Nicolle in his little bibliography and which was first published in French (and is atrociously expensive!) or Helen Zimmern's *The Hansa Towns*, which was initially published over a century ago and was translated from German. Somewhat curiously, David Nicolle did not list this latter title and also omitted a couple of more recent publications in English which could have helped readers looking for more (and which I have listed at the end of the review). Instead, he lists some 22 references in German. While this high number is unsurprising, these references will hardly be helpful for any English reader that does not also read German. My second issue with this volume is however more important. This publication is titled *Forces of the Hanseatic League*. Alongside to descriptions about troop types, I was expecting to get some idea of the numbers involved, at least for some of the major cities of the League. There is not a single number or indication about the effectives that, say, Lübeck or Bremen, or even the whole League mobilised, neither is there the slightest indication of how many ships the League was either able or effectively did put at sea.

#### FORCES OF THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE: 13TH AND 15TH CENTURIES DAVID

NICOLLE OSPREY PUBLICATIONS, 2014 QUALITY SOFTCOVER, \$17.95, 48 PAGES, MAPS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ILLUSTRATIONS, GLOSSARY, CHRONOLOGY

In the 12th Century, German traders at Visby, on the island of Gotland in the Baltic, formed a cooperative association. Similar associations of German traders were established later at London (where the League's trading post was called The Steelyard); Bergen, Norway; Novgorod, Russia; and Bruges, Flanders. In Germany, the fall of the Hohenstaufen dynasty in 1254 ended strong Imperial rule. Northern German towns began forming leagues to defend their trading rights abroad. Soon the associations of German merchants abroad united with the northern German towns to form the Hanseatic League. Many cities along the Baltic coast had experienced significant growth since the late 13th Century. This growth was driven by a rising volume of trade; itself driven by agricultural surpluses and expansion of cloth and metal industries around Europe. The cities came under a variety of political controls, and trade and manufacturers were controlled by various guilds within each city, so there was no single entity with any authority over the economic process. The League grew in power throughout the first half of

the 14th Century. It virtually monopolized trade on the Baltic and North Seas, especially in cod and herring, furs, lumber, grain, cloth, and minerals. It suppressed piracy, improved navigation by dredging waterways, and building lighthouses and canals. Courts were established at the League's foreign trading posts to settle disputes among members. Laws were drawn up for commercial operations and offenders were boycotted.

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