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Indravati Félicité, *Négociier pour exister: Les villes et duchés du nord de l'Empire face à la France 1650–1730*. *Pariser Historische Studien*, 105. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016. 545 pp. Tables, bibliography, index. \$77.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-3-11-041520-9. \$77.00 U.S. (eb). ISBN 978-3-11-041549-0.

Indravati Félicité, *Das Königreich Frankreich und die norddeutschen Hansestädte und Herzogtümer (1650–1730)*. *Diplomatie zwischen ungleichen Partnern. Quellen und Darstellungen zur hansischen Geschichte, Neue Folge—Band 75*. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2017. 439 pp. Tables, bibliography, index. €60.00 (hb). ISBN 978-3-412-50918-7.

Review by Michael North, Universität Greifswald.

This remarkable monograph originated in a Sorbonne Dissertation of 2012 and has been published simultaneously in French and a German translation. Indravati Félicité examines for the first time the diplomatic relations between France and the Hanseatic cities of Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck, as well as the Northern Duchies of Holstein-Gottorf and Mecklenburg-Schwerin. While the various alliances of Rhineland Electors/territories, such as the Rheinbund (Rhenish Alliance) of 1658, have been thoroughly researched, northern Germany has remained a lacuna with respect to its French relationships.

In the period after the Peace of Westphalia, Sweden dominated Northern Germany politically, although this dominance was challenged by Denmark and Brandenburg-Prussia. Furthermore, the Emperor tried to strengthen his influence in the Northern territories by reasserting his position as feudal overlord and playing the role of mediator between his vassals. Thus, for the second-rate powers of Holstein-Gottorf and Mecklenburg-Schwerin, as well for the Hanseatic cities, diplomatic relations with France were seen as a cornerstone of their sovereignty. In the first part of her book, Indravati Félicité examines the various diplomatic strategies of the Hanseatic cities and the Duchies to defend themselves against the various threats and interventions by Denmark, Sweden, and Brandenburg-Prussia. France acted as peacekeeper in the north in order to prevent increasing imperial influence. Furthermore, the French mediated between Denmark and Holstein Gottorf to avoid the outbreak of war. For the Hanseatic cities, the relationships with France had central importance. In a contract on shipping between the Hanseatic cities and France from 1665, the Hanseatic cities were not only recognized as diplomatic partners of France, but also received the privilege of most favored trading partner, as well as protection against French privateers who had threatened Hanseatic shipping in the Atlantic.

The second part of the book deals with negotiating processes and examines decision making, access to information, and communication. In this “new diplomatic history,” Indravati Félicité presents the protagonists of the decision-making processes, the lawyers of the Hanseatic cities as well as the envoys and ambassadors of the northern German duchies. In France the north German diplomats were often regarded as humble petitioners, who had to use all kinds of means—especially their own financial means—to gain access to French decision makers. These required the careful cultivation of relations with other diplomats or statesmen and active involvement in the political, cultural, or economic networks of the respective court.

Their efforts also required access to information about French policies. Apart from personal contacts they worked hard to make, (travel) reports, books, and newspapers played an important role. There was, however, an information gap between Hamburg as knowledge center and Holstein-Gottorf, which only sporadically received French-speaking newspapers during the seventeenth century. At the same time, France was well informed about Hamburg and the Hanseatic cities, which were portrayed in economic reports as trading partners with great potential and as rivals to the Dutch Republic. Knowledge about Holstein-Gottorf and Mecklenburg-Schwerin, however, was limited. France’s lesser interest in the north was mirrored in a mistaken perception of the Baltic Sea region, where it underestimated Russia’s expansion, for example. The French government regarded the cities and principalities of the north largely as mediators, never as central actors in the diplomatic game. In French eyes, only the port of Hamburg had great importance, but French dominance among Hamburg’s trading partners only began in the mid-eighteenth century, when Hamburg established a stable foothold in the French re-export trade of sugar and coffee.

Indravati Félicité’s well-written book serves to raise awareness for the north German cities and duchies in French historiography. She shows that relations with France were regarded as important by the northern states and that they were crucial for the Hanseatic cities. This book deserves a broad reception. It would be useful if, in her future work, Indravati Félicité were to use her extensive knowledge to compare the relations between north Germany and France with those between south Germany and France. In this respect, the influence of the imperial court on the shaping of diplomatic relations between France and the southern German states could also be examined.

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