



RÉGION  
Nouvelle-  
Aquitaine

ÉPISODE **#25**

# **LA ROCHELLE AND THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE**

Script, text  
drawings & colors :  
Catherine Moreau  
and  
Alain Paillou



The Gabut district and its colorful wooden houses :  
the spirit of Scandinavia.

## **The Hanseatic League**

was a medieval trading league that played a crucial role in the development of trade in Northern Europe, mainly between the 12th and 17th centuries.

In the Middle Ages, La Rochelle was already a thriving commercial centre, particularly for its salt and wine. Thanks to its strategic geographical position and its trade links with other European ports, it was in contact with the merchants of the Hanseatic League...

A relationship that has evolved over time, but continues to this day!

Come aboard our ship and let's discover the topic of the Hanseatic League!

DEBOUT LES GARS,  
RÉVEILLENZ-VOUS 🎵  
ON VA AU BOUT  
DU MON-DEUUU!

COME ABOARD  
OUR SHIP AND  
LET'S DISCOVER THE  
TOPIC OF THE  
HANSEATIC LEAGUE!

LA ROCHELLE

THE ARCHITECTURE OF  
LA ROCHELLE BEARS WITNESS  
TO THE SUCCESS OF  
THE GREAT SHIPBUILDING  
ENTREPRENEURIAL FAMILIES.

BUT  
DID YOU KNOW THAT  
FROM THE MIDDLE AGES  
ONWARDS, THE TOWN WAS  
ONE OF THE BUSIEST TRADING  
CENTRES ON THE ATLANTIC  
COAST?

COASTAL SHIPPING  
ENABLED IT TO MAINTAIN LINKS  
WITH OTHER PORTS  
IN THE REGION AND TO SELL  
LOCAL PRODUCE:

HOP!

OLÉRON

RÉ

CEREALS,  
THE STAPLE FOOD,  
AND SALT, WHICH  
PRESERVED FOOD... BUT...

HEY THERE!

WHERE HAVE YOU  
COME FROM?

SORRY,  
I DIDN'T  
SEE YOU...

LÜBECK

FROM LÜBECK,  
ON THE BALTIC SEA.  
YOU KNOW WE'RE VERY  
INTERESTED IN  
YOUR SALT?

DON'T YOU HAVE ENOUGH ALREADY?

YES, BUT YOU HAVE TO DIG, AND THAT'S VERY EXPENSIVE...

SO WHERE DID YOU GO THROUGH?

BRUGES

I STOPPED OFF IN BRUGES, AND FROM THERE I TOOK THE OLD VIKING ROUTE!

BY THE WAY, DO YOU KNOW OF ANY OTHER UNIQUE PRODUCTS I COULD TAKE HOME?

WELL, WE'VE GOT A NICE LITTLE WINE...

WHAT'S MORE, WE'VE GOT PLENTY IN STOCK, BECAUSE EVER SINCE WE BECAME PART OF THE KINGDOM OF FRANCE IN 1224, THE ENGLISH HAVE PREFERRED BORDEAUX WINES TO OURS...

TOP THAT!

die Hanse

AND WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT OF BUSINESS, LET ME INTRODUCE YOU TO THE MERCHANTS OF THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE!

IN THE 12TH CENTURY, WHEN STATE POWER WAS FRAGMENTED AND PIRACY WAS RIFE, HAMBURG, LÜBECK AND SEVERAL OTHER CITIES DECIDED TO COOPERATE AND FORM THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE.



THERE IS NO CENTRAL POWER HERE, AND WE ARE NOT DEPENDENT ON ANY KING. DECISIONS ARE TAKEN BY MAJORITY VOTE AT ASSEMBLIES HELD IN LÜBECK, GERMANY.



MAJORITY VOTING WILL NEVER WORK!

WE NEGOTIATE TRADE PRIVILEGES WITH THE STATES, AND WE DEFEND THEM TOOTH AND NAIL!



TRAVELLING IN GROUPS, OUR COGGES (30 M LONG, 7 M WIDE, 200 TONNES) LINKED THE CITIES OF THE BALTIC SEA AND THE NORTH SEA.

FURS, METALS, FABRICS, HERRING, GRAIN, WOOD... EVERYTHING THAT WAS SOLD AT THE TIME PASSED THROUGH US, THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE!



TRADE WITH THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE WAS A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE PROSPERITY OF LA ROCHELLE, AS EVIDENCED BY ITS FIRST SEAL.



THE TOWN WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A GIGANTIC WAREHOUSE:

FABRICS FROM FLANDERS.

PEWTER FROM CORNWALL,

LINEN FROM GERMANY,

HERRING FROM SCOTLAND AND LÜBECK,

SILK AND BROCADE FROM THE EAST,

FURS FROM RUSSIA,

COD FROM THE NORTH SEA,

WOOD FROM SWEDEN

AND AMBER FROM THE BALTIC WERE DISTRIBUTED INLAND OR SHIPPED BACK TO OTHER COASTAL REGIONS...



... WHILE SALT AND WINE,  
PRODUCED IN ABUNDANCE IN THE  
REGION, ARE EXPORTED  
NORTHWARDS.



THAT'S REALLY MODERN!

SURPRISINGLY,  
I DON'T SEE ANY BRICK  
HOUSES OR WOODEN  
WAREHOUSES HERE...



EVIDENCE OF  
OUR TRADE IS DISCREET  
BUT IT DOES EXIST!

IT WAS THANKS TO TRADE  
WITH NORTHERN EUROPE  
THAT THE TOWERS OF  
LA ROCHELLE WERE BUILT...



ON PLACE DE VERDUN,  
YOU CAN STILL ADMIRE A HOUSE  
WITH A STEPPED GABLE,  
TYPICAL OF FLEMISH  
ARCHITECTURE...

RUE  
DE  
L'ESCALE

AS FOR  
THE COBBLESTONES IN  
THE RUE DE L'ESCALE,  
THEY MAY HAVE BEEN USED  
AS BALLAST BY SHIPS  
FROM SCANDINAVIA.

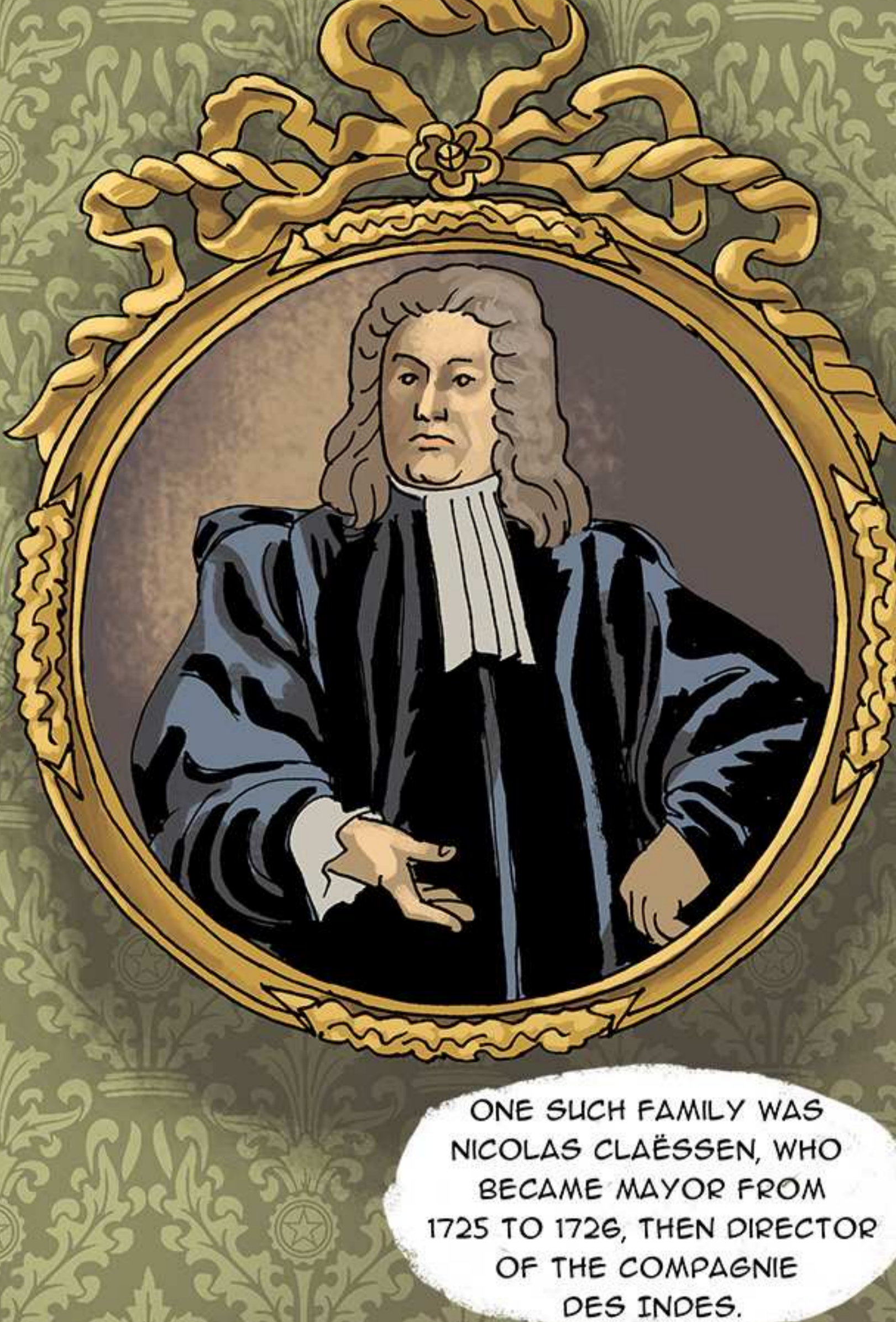
AAAAH,  
I IMMEDIATELY FEEL  
MORE AT HOME HERE!

BUT IT'S NOT JUST THE GOODS  
THAT COUNT! PROTESTANTISM  
MAY EVEN HAVE SPREAD THROUGH  
THE POPULATION OF LA ROCHELLE  
AS A RESULT OF CONTACT WITH  
THE CREWS WHO CONVERTED  
TO LUTHERANISM.

?!



A NUMBER OF WEALTHY GERMAN, FLEMISH AND DUTCH FAMILIES SETTLED IN LA ROCHELLE IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES...



ONE SUCH FAMILY WAS NICOLAS CLAËSSEN, WHO BECAME MAYOR FROM 1725 TO 1726, THEN DIRECTOR OF THE COMPAGNIE DES INDES.



OOPS, I HADN'T SEEN THE CENTURIES GO BY!

JUST THINK, A CERTAIN CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS DISCOVERED THE AMERICAS IN 1492!

AND THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING!



THE PEOPLE OF LA ROCHELLE TURNED FROM TIMID SEASIDERS TO BEING SO SELF-ASSURED THAT AS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 16TH CENTURY, THEY NO LONGER HESITATED AND BUILT THEIR OWN SHIPS.

THIS TIME, IT WAS THE NEW WORLD AND ITS FABULOUS RICHES THAT ATTRACTED THEIR ATTENTION!



DESPITE THE RISKS INVOLVED IN SAILING, COD FISHING OFF THE COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND TRADE WITH THE WEST INDIES, BRAZIL AND FLORIDA OFFERED UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF PROFIT.

THE CLOSURE OF THE NOVGOROD TRADING POST IN RUSSIA, THE DECLINE OF THE LONDON TRADING POST AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF SEVERAL MERCHANT TOWNS SOUNDED THE DEATH KNELL FOR THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE.



IT WATCHED HELPLESSLY AS TWO FIERCE COMPETITORS EMERGED: HOLLAND AND ENGLAND.



BUT IT WAS THE PEACE OF WESTPHALIA, SIGNED IN 1648, THAT DEALT THE FATAL BLOW TO THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE...



IT COULD ALL HAVE ENDED THERE...

IN 1980, ON THE INITIATIVE OF ZWOLLE IN THE NETHERLANDS, THE IDEA WAS LAUNCHED OF REVIVING THE HANSEATIC NETWORK.

WITH 196 TOWNS IN 16 COUNTRIES AND 20 MILLION INHABITANTS, THE NEW HANSEATIC LEAGUE IS THE LARGEST ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN TOWNS.

EVERY YEAR, ONE OF THE HANSEATIC TOWNS WELCOMES THE OTHERS TO EXCHANGE CULTURAL TRADITIONS, SHARE KNOWLEDGE, INVOLVE THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS AND STRENGTHEN ECONOMIC, COMMERCIAL AND TOURIST CONTACTS.



BY HIGHLIGHTING THE HISTORICAL LINKS BETWEEN ITS TOWNS AND CITIES, THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE HAS HELPED TO DEVELOP TRANSNATIONAL TOURIST ROUTES, WHICH MANY TOUR OPERATORS NOW OFFER TO THEIR CUSTOMERS.



THE HANSA ROUTE IS RECOGNIZED BY THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AS ONE OF EUROPE'S MOST IMPORTANT CULTURAL ROUTES.



LA ROCHELLE HAS BEEN A SISTER CITY WITH LÜBECK SINCE 1988, AND IS STILL REGARDED AS THE 'QUEEN' OF THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE. IT WAS THE ONLY FRENCH TOWN TO JOIN THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE IN 2004, AND REGULARLY TAKES PART IN THE INTERNATIONAL HANSEATIC DAYS.



AS A RESULT, LA ROCHELLE WELCOMES NEARLY 3 MILLION VISITORS A YEAR, MANY OF THEM BRITISH, GERMAN AND DUTCH, SO :

WILLKOMMEN,  
BIENVENUE,  
WELCOME !



DRAWINGS:  
ALAIN PAILLOU

SCRIPT AND COLORS:  
CATHERINE MOREAU

TRANSLATION:  
OLIVIER LEBLEU  
& ADRIANA BONEWITZ



## **Acknowledgements**

Gisela Sebbin  
and Gérard Brousseau

### **Learn more**

**The bilingual book**

**La Rochelle :**

**Sur les traces de la Ligue Hanséatique,  
In the footsteps of the Hanseatic League.**  
written by Thomas Brosset and Maggie Cole  
at Le Croît Vif Editions

VILLE DE **LA  
ROCHELLE**



Lauréat de  
l'appel à projet  
Culture  
Tourisme  
et Numérique  
2022



RÉGION  
**Nouvelle-  
Aquitaine**