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*Closing the distance: Hanseatic traders in Holland and at the Great Council, 1525-1545*

This paper looks at the theory of ‘social distance’ (simply put, the differences in norms and beliefs) and ‘legal distance’ (differences in legal practices and normative reference frameworks) pioneered in the field of law and economics, and applies it to the involvement of foreign traders and actors, specifically German-Hanseatic and Nordic in legal proceedings at the main two ‘central’ courts for Holland-Zeeland in the sixteenth century, the Council of Holland and the Great Council. In the past, literature accounting for commercial development in the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries has argued for the primacy of cities and their legal institutions in promoting an environment conducive to trade. This has since been contested, at least for late medieval Flanders, arguing towards a model of complementarity and consultation between central and urban levels. I study several cases of commercial conflict brought before the highest court of appeal in the Low Countries, the Great Council, against verdicts and judgments from ‘lower’ courts in Holland-Zeeland between 1525 and 1545. This allows us to discern whether concepts such as legal and social distance can help us in understanding the reasons or strategies involved in choosing to litigate or appear at a central court that is not one’s own. The paper finishes by concluding that closing, or attempting to close, these legal and social distances help us understand why foreign merchants were willing to take their case to and appear at courts that were not theirs or their prince’s.

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