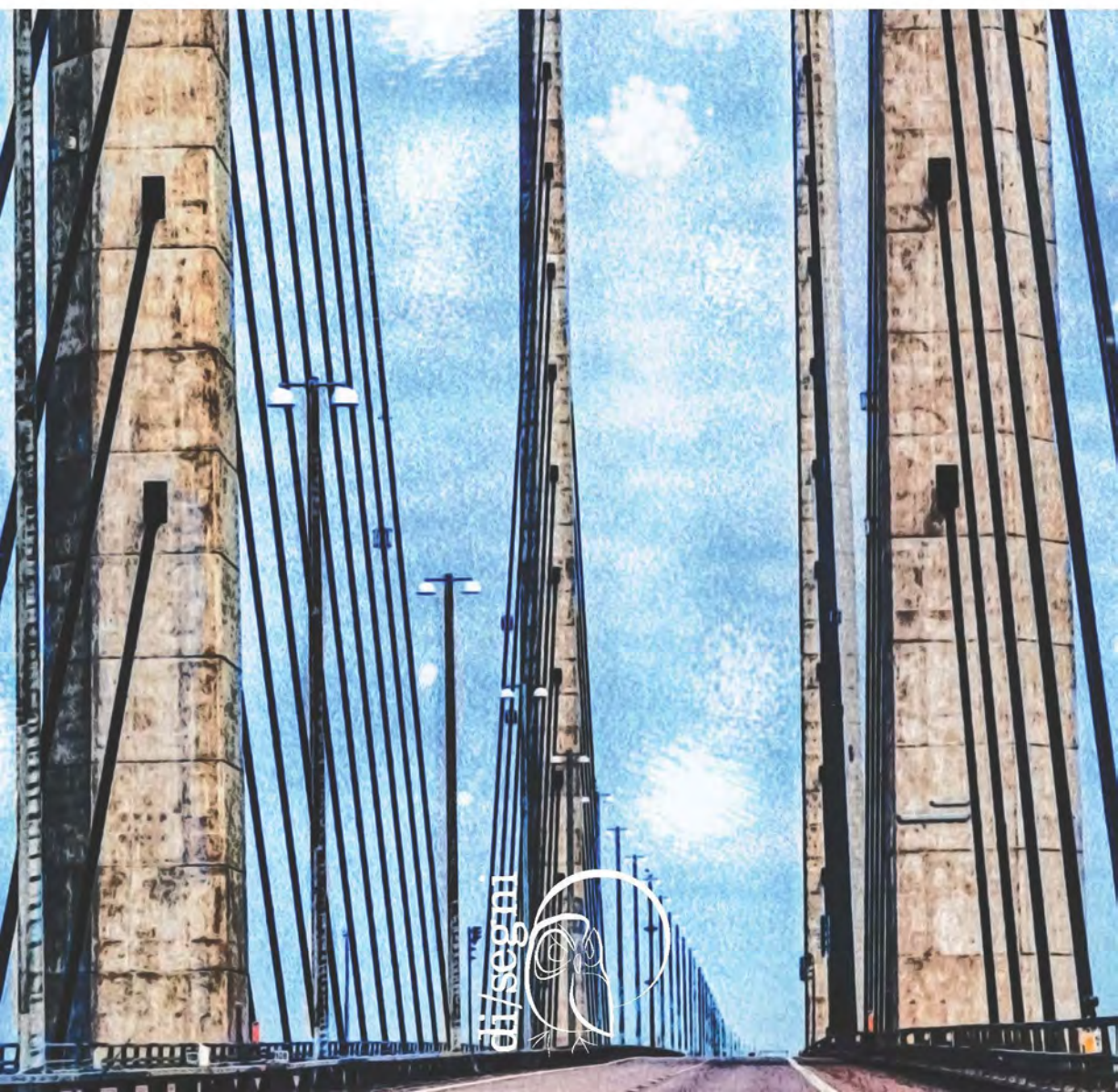


BRIDGES TO SCANDINAVIA

Edited by Andrea Meregalli and Camilla Storskog





BRIDGES TO SCANDINAVIA

Edited by *Andrea Meregalli and Camilla Storskog*

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LÜBECK'S BURGOMASTER JÜRGEN WULLENWEVER AND DENMARK

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Jürgen Wullenwever¹ (Hamburg, before 1488 – Wolfenbüttel, 1537) was a famous burgomaster of Lübeck, whose place in history has not yet been clarified. He was in charge of the city for only two years (1533-35), but in the context of deep political, economic and religious changes in Europe, he contributed to a whole series of events, which affected the community of Lübeck both positively and negatively. Even the most recent evaluation of the facts (Postel 2010) has not led to a definitive assessment of Wullenwever's political activities. An analysis based on the documentation of the time could help us to understand these years.

1. Thanks to the historian Georg Waitz,² who edited a large number of archival documents written at that time concerning Wullenwever (Waitz 1855-56),³ we know many details of the burgomaster's life and conduct: he hailed from Hamburg, probably belonged to a family of merchants, and settled in Lübeck in 1524 as a result of his marriage.

At that time, the Reformation was spreading in central and northern Europe. Lübeck was a free imperial city; because of its direct subjection to

¹ Good summaries of Wullenwever's biography are Schäfer 1898 and Postel 2011. The spelling *Wullenwever* is in Low German. Sometimes it appears wrongly in modern sources as *Wullenweber*, but the correct High German form should be *Wollenweber* (Waitz 1855-56, I, 286).

² About Georg Waitz see Srbik 1950-51, I, 297-99.

³ Waitz expounds on and edits commercial treaties, city covenants, imperial notes, council ratifications, public and private missives, trial transcripts, coeval chronicles, and even a couple of political songs. The majority of the documents are written in Middle Low German, a few in Middle English. Latin texts are mostly summarised by Waitz. Quotations from his work will be indicated with the author's surname followed by the number of the volume and the page.

the Emperor, the City Council was reluctant to approve the new doctrine. Wullenwever is mentioned starting from 1530, when he began taking an active part in the citizens' uprisings in favour of Lutheranism and of greater popular participation in the Council's activities. He stood out among the protesters and soon became a member of and spokesman for the *64-Ausschuss*, a board of 64 citizens chosen among artisans and merchants, on occasion augmented by a further hundred citizens, who took part in the Council's resolutions. This democratic development and the fact that Wullenwever obtained recognition of the Reformation by the Council aroused the opposition of two of the four burgomasters who ruled in those years, Nikolaus Brömse and Hermann Plönnies: they abandoned Lübeck and took refuge at the Emperor's court.

The confessional question was only one of the problems of the age. After the Fall of Constantinople (1453) the Empire had to protect the southeastern border from the Ottoman threat. Depending on the political situation and the gravity of the menace, the Emperor imposed new taxes (*Türkensteuer*) at different times. In 1529 a new request for this tax was issued, and the Lübeck City Council was to enforce it. However, the citizens objected to it because they were not any richer than in previous decades. In fact Lübeck had once been the most important city of the Hanseatic League (Jahnke 2013, 54), benefiting from trade privileges on land, in alliance with Hamburg, and at sea, in the Sound. Indeed, as Lübeck enjoyed the staple right, it gained from opportunities to buy goods at favourable prices as well as from high taxation. To avoid such duties, since the previous century other cities and countries had been developing alternate routes towards new trading centres in Poland, in particular Danzig, and in the Low Countries (Gelderblom 2013, 34-35). Holland, too, tried to reach the eastern Baltic lands by bypassing Lübeck's staple port and by seeking other ports with lower freight costs, thus making their goods more competitive: Lübeck's flourishing time had long since come to an end.

The aggressive commercial policy of the Dutch resulted in frequent naval warfare.⁴ But all the Hanseatic cities now tended to defend their own interests instead of those of the league. Among them, Lübeck was the one most concerned with keeping Dutch ships out of the Sound in order to safeguard and re-establish its dominance. Wullenwever made this problem the focus of his policy, securing himself a large popular consensus, so that in 1533 he was appointed as one of the four burgomasters.

2. As soon as Wullenwever entered the field, he became very active in foreign negotiations. He considered Denmark the best partner to hinder Dutch ships, though Denmark was actually helping the Dutch to safely navigate around the Jutland peninsula, a route which brought Denmark new revenue from excise taxes. It was therefore difficult to loosen the close link between

⁴ For a good summary of the events of the time see Sicking 2004, 223-25.

Denmark and Holland. The two countries were bound by Christian II, the former king of Denmark and Norway, who had been deposed by his uncle Frederick I because of his despotic rule. He was thus exiled to Holland, a territory belonging to Christian's brother-in-law, the Emperor Charles V. In the autumn of 1531 Christian tried to regain the crown by sailing to Norway. There was a danger that the Emperor would send his fleet to support his brother-in-law, so Frederick asked for Lübeck's help and promised, in return, an alliance against the Dutch merchant ships. But when, in the summer of 1532, Christian was defeated and captured, Frederick did not need Wullenwever's help any longer and restored his commercial relationship with Holland. Lübeck reacted by sending privateers to make incursions in the Sound against the Dutch. These sea raids were financed by the treasures confiscated from Catholic churches and monasteries.

Frederick I ruled until his death on 10 April 1533. The vacant throne began the so-called Count's Feud (1534-36) among those noblemen who refused to accept Duke Christian of Gottorp, Frederick's son, as the new king (later called Christian III). In this dynastic conflict some aimed to secure the throne for themselves, while others took part in the feud as supporters of other aspirants. The feud takes its name from Count Christopher of Oldenburg, who started the dispute. With the aid of troops from Copenhagen and Malmö, he tried to help Christian II regain his crown. Christian II, although seen as a despotic king by many, had followed policies favouring the middle class and the peasants (Derry 1996, 82), with the result that he was well regarded by those who aimed to obtain greater democracy in Scandinavia. Wullenwever, who had been elected burgomaster one month before Frederick's death (8 March), thought he could take advantage of the feud in the hope of restoring Lübeck's commercial supremacy. He offered troops and ships to different parties, first to Count Christopher, who supported the 'democratic' Christian II, even though the exiled king was a Catholic and was the same man he had fought against a few months earlier together with Frederick. Wullenwever proposed a similar alliance to Duke Albrecht VII of Mecklenburg, whose family claimed a hereditary right to the throne of Norway and Sweden, and to the Elector of Saxony John Frederick I, the head of the Schmalkaldic League of Protestant cities.

Wullenwever felt sure of Lübeck's military superiority thanks to captain Marcus (Marx) Meyer, a cunning warlord, who was leading the sea raids against the Dutch. Meyer had also ravaged Holstein, both trying to capture Christian II and to rob the Catholic aristocracy, who were Lübeck's major enemy since the city had embraced Lutheranism and had expropriated all the Church's wealth. Meyer was arrested for piracy in England, but he gained the favour of King Henry VIII, who made him a knight. Meyer convinced him to enter a coalition with Lübeck against the Catholic Emperor Charles V, and as a reward for this he let Henry dream of the crown of Denmark.

But the most important figure in the feud was Frederick's son, the future Christian III, supported by Gustav Vasa of Sweden. Christian was the only party involved in the feud who did not make a pact with Wullenwever. His troops were able to defeat all adversaries. He had already been chosen as king in July 1534, but the Count's Feud only ended after the conclusion of all hostilities, in July 1535, and the peace treaty was signed on 14 February 1536.

3. The historical documents relating these years – during Wullenwever's political commitment to the *64-Ausschuss* and afterwards as burgomaster – include many letters of messengers and assembly reports which testify to Wullenwever's constant attempts to obtain financial or military help from the other Hanseatic cities; with little result, however, as Lübeck's foreign policy was considered reckless by most of them.⁵ Wullenwever's obsession with his Dutch commercial rivals had caused considerable dissatisfaction among his citizens: the naval wars had blocked all commerce by sea, and the city was increasingly impoverished for lack of income and goods. While Wullenwever's aggressive policy against Holland had at first been welcomed by the population, though at a heavy cost, it caused too many deprivations in the long term; and a siege of the city by Christian III during the feud, in the autumn of 1534, was the last straw. It resulted in a request for the restoration of the former City Council and the return of the two burgomasters who had fled.

The Emperor issued an ultimatum and, on 26 August 1535, Wullenwever resigned. He was offered a role as a clerk, but he refused and went on fighting with the help of mercenaries. Wullenwever was now considered a public danger. On 15 November 1535, the Archbishop of Bremen Christoph of Brunswick-Lüneburg and the burgomaster Nikolaus Brömse had him arrested on a charge of crimes against God, the Empire and the Church. In addition, Denmark accused him of theft and treachery. Wullenwever was tortured until he admitted that he had taken part in an Anabaptist conspiracy against the Lübeck council (Waitz III, 492, 517).⁶ On 24 September 1537 he was beheaded and dismembered in Wolfenbüttel at the seat of the court of justice of the Principality of Brunswick.

4. Lübeck has never forgotten its courageous and unscrupulous burgomaster. His character is glorified in different poems, plays and novels⁷

⁵ About the Count's Feud and monetary support from Stralsund and other Pomeranian cities, see Heyden 1966.

⁶ Anabaptists were a politicised heretical group, whose massacre in Münster on 24 June 1535 stirred indignation and fear (Scott 2013, 195; Iserloh [1980] 1982, 90-91).

⁷ Searching in library catalogues, the works found are: a historical poem by Hermann Neumann, *Jürgen Wullenwever, der kühne Demagoge* (*Jürgen Wullenwever, the Brave Demagogue*; Leipzig 1846), described hereafter (Neumann 1846); Ludwig Köhler's *Jürgen Wullenwever. Historischer Roman in sieben Büchern* (*Jürgen Wullenwever. Historical Novel in Seven Books*; 3 volumes, Leipzig 1856); a drama by Heinrich Kruse, *Wullenwever. Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen*

starting from the age of *Vormärz* (Postel 2010, 26), when he was seen as a democrat who fought for enfranchisement and freedom from the power of the aristocracy. This is the subject of the long poem by Hermann Neumann *Jürgen Wullenwever, der kühne Demagoge* (1846), in which 26 strophic chapters describe the apotheosis of the burgomaster and narrate his nemesis, although the subtitle *der kühne Demagoge* leaves the judgement on his legacy open: he was audacious, but he became a demagogue. His execution is depicted here as martyrdom:

Zwei lange Jahre hatte überwunden
 Der edle Dulder in des Kerkers Nacht,
 Eh' sein Prozeß zu Ende ward gebracht,
 Und er den martervollen Tod gefunden.
 (Neumann 1846, 146)⁸

In 1922 the Lübeck municipality named a street after the burgomaster (Busch 2011), and in 1937 the artist Charles Derlien (Fink 1938, 29) painted his portrait without a description of Wullenwever's actual appearance, apart from a caricature painted in 1537 shortly after his death: a half-length portrait featuring a bearded head and a big nose (Wullenweber 1962, 95).⁹ The later painting has a similar aspect, but the hero displays a much nobler personality. This painting is still hanging in the Gallery at Lübeck City Hall. Wullenwever was idealised during Nazism for his tireless defence of Lübeck's commercial supremacy against foreigners. In 1938, Georg Fink, the director of Lübeck's archive in those years, wrote that Wullenwever was a captivating man of the people ("ein hinreißender Volksmann"; quoted in Wullenweber 1962, 96), and the renowned expert of Hanseatic history, Hans Pagel, depicted him in 1942 as a courageous man who never surrendered: "Wullenwever war seit den Niederlagen ein geschlagener Mann. Aber noch gab er nicht auf: 'Nun sind wir drin und müssen durch'" (Pagel 1942, 500).¹⁰

(*Wullenwever. Tragedy in Five Acts*; Leipzig 1870); Carl Gutzkow's *Wullenwever. Trauerspiel in fünf Aufzügen* (*Wullenwever. Tragedy in Five Acts*; Jena 1872); a historical drama by Fritz von Unruh, *Jürgen Wullenwever* (1910, ed. Berlin 1975); a Low German play by Franz Fromme, *Juergen Wullenwever unde Marks Meyer. Een nedderduetsch Spill* (*Juergen Wullenwever and Marks Meyer. A Low German Drama*; Lübeck 1924); a novel by Ehm Welk, *Gewitter über Gotland* (*Storm over Gotland*, 1926), which was adapted for the Berliner Völksbühne by Erwin Piscator in 1927 (cf. Hammel-Kiesow [2000] 2008, 4); and a novel by Hugo Paul Schreiber-Uhlenbusch, *Jürgen Wullenwever* (Stuttgart 1937).

⁸ "Two long years had the noble silent sufferer / endured in the dungeon's night, / before his trial was brought to an end, / and he met a martyr's death." All translations are mine.

⁹ The two paintings can be seen in Busch 2011.

¹⁰ "After his defeat Wullenwever was a beaten man. But he did not give up just yet: 'We are in the middle of it and we must pull through.'" Pagel quotes a sentence said by Wullenwever in 1535 (Waitz II, 236).

Understandably, the burgomaster's image tended to be seen negatively by any opponent of Nazism. Thomas Mann, in a speech held at the BBC on 5 April 1942, reported on the bombing of his city and spoke about his family house, *Buddenbrook-Haus*, which had been renamed by the Nazis *Wullenwever-Haus* in order to erase all traces of the famous author, although the building was erected two centuries later:

Das dumme Gesindel weiß nicht einmal, dass ein Haus, das den Stempel des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts an seinem Rokoko-Giebel trägt, nicht gut mit dem verwegenen Bürgermeister des sechzehnten etwas zu tun haben kann. Jürgen Wullenweber hat seiner Stadt durch den Krieg mit Dänemark viel Schaden zugefügt, und die Lübecker haben mit ihm getan, was die Deutschen denn doch vielleicht eines Tages mit denen tun werden, die sie in diesen Krieg geführt haben: sie haben ihn hingerichtet (Mann [1987] 2013, 59).¹¹

According to Thomas Mann, Wullenwever is *verwegen*, which means both daring and aggressive; comparing him to Nazi war criminals, Mann underlines that he deserved the death penalty. After the Second World War another figure criticised Wullenwever: the new director of the Lübeck archives, Ahasver von Brandt (1954), referred to Wullenwever's bold but clumsy fist ("kühnplumper Faust"; quoted in Wullenweber 1962, 87). But it appears that the figure of the burgomaster could be used as a symbol to bolster any ideology; having fought against aristocracy in favour of popular participation, Wullenwever was idealised by socialists: in the same year – 1954 – the SPD founded the printing house *Wullenwever Druckerei*, which is still in operation today.

5. We have seen that Wullenwever defended his city strenuously against Lübeck's Dutch commercial rivals, but in trying to achieve this, his attempts to take advantage of the political weakness of Denmark failed miserably. While today he is seen either as a valiant man or as a demagogue, opposite factions dominated the social and political landscape of his age, too: there were violent contrasts between aristocracy and common men (the rising bourgeoisie and the peasants), and while Catholics had to face Lutherans, the imperial cities, in particular those with new democratic ambitions belonging to the Schmalkaldic League, conflicted with the Emperor.¹²

¹¹ "That stupid rabble does not even know that a house that bears the brand of the eighteenth century on its rococo pediment cannot have anything to do with the reckless burgomaster of the sixteenth century. Jürgen Wullenwever inflicted a lot of damage on his city by waging war on Denmark, and the citizens of Lübeck did to him what the Germans may one day do to those who have led them into this war: they executed him."

¹² For the connection between the Reformation, social changes and political conflicts after

In the documents collected by Georg Waitz it is possible to recognise all the conflicts of the time. The words that express them most clearly are *Freund* ('friend') and *Feind* ('enemy'), referred to persons, cities, nations. For instance, in a letter written on behalf of the *64-Ausschuss* to Rostock's Council in 1531, Wullenwever tries to convince this allied Hanseatic city to contribute, together with Lübeck, to Frederick I's fight against Christian II. The exiled king is simply described as an enemy: "konigk Christiern unser sampt vyenth" (Waitz I, 312).¹³ At the same time, Wullenwever calls his Rostock's addressees *Freunde* at the beginning of the same letter: "Unnsen fruntlicken gruth thovorn, Ersamen unde vorsichtigen gunstigen guden frunde."¹⁴

A song describing Lübeck's political situation in 1534, when the *64-Ausschuss* failed, now sees its members, former champions of democracy, as enemies:

Wor iß de Rhat der stede,
den du verdechtig hölst
der Meente in unfrede? [...]
Schla nu den fiendt vam door.

(Waitz II, 347)¹⁵

By contrast, King Henry VIII cements his alliance with Wullenwever, calling him his friend: in a letter to Bremen's Council, written in December 1535 or January 1536, he complains that the fallen burgomaster has been arrested and tortured: "mit offentligenn unrechten der frambst unnd unschuldigst mann unnsere besonnder guter freundt beladen und ihm zugefugt wirth" (Waitz III, 472).¹⁶

Wullenwever as a person is often depicted negatively from the beginning of his public life. Apart from *Feind*, he is described as evil, violent, a traitor, and a person with suspect behaviour.¹⁷ In 1530 a citizen of Lübeck, Jürgen Velth[eim], writes a letter of complaint to the City Council, in which he reports that Wullenwever is an "evidently overt enemy" ("apenbar entsechten viendt"), who brings "great injustice" ("des groten unrechtenn";

the Peasants' War see Blickle 1998.

¹³ "King Christian, the enemy of us all."

¹⁴ "First of all our friendly greeting [to our] honourable and attentive and favourable good friends."

¹⁵ "Where is the City Council, / which you suspect / [to have] spread strife in town? [...] / Drive the enemy out of the door."

¹⁶ "Charged and inflicted with clear injustice the most pious and innocent man, our particularly good friend."

¹⁷ Words of approval are quite rare in the documents; the most frequent adjective used with reference to Wullenwever is *ehrsam* ('honourable'), a common designation for the burgomaster and for the other functionaries in the City Council.

Waitz I, 288). A witness from Danzig, Johann Fürstenberg, who relates Wullenwever's journey to Copenhagen on 8 July 1533, says that his behaviour at sea is suspect and warns his city against his fleet: "Dusse punct is my suspect" (Waitz I, 386).¹⁸ In a missive by Christian III to Duke Henry V of Mecklenburg (Albrecht VII's brother) dated 6 July 1534, the future king writes about Wullenwever: "dat he by der stat Lubeck also ein deeff und vorreder gehandelt hadde" (Waitz II, 256).¹⁹ In a report of citizens gathering in front of Lübeck's City Hall on 3 July 1535, different voices say that it is necessary "den hasen sla dar he sittet [...] dath were h. Jurgen Wul., de vorreder, de bosewicht" (Waitz III, 404).²⁰ When Wullenwever is arrested on 15 November 1535, a report speaks of a violent burgomaster ("ein geweldigk burgermeisterher"; Waitz III, 469).

Wullenwever's reckless behaviour is often described by his opponents using the word *Aufruhr* ('riot') and its derivative *auführerisch* ('riotous'). When in January 1536 Christian III has Wullenwever tortured, the report of the interrogation states that Wullenwever started this riot and feud ("dieße aufroher unnd vheide angefangen"; Waitz III, 485), and that he, together with the Danish people of Copenhagen, had set in motion this treachery and riot ("dieße vorrethery und aufror haben zw werke gestelleth"). In another text, an emissary from Bremen, who took part in a gathering on 12, 13 and 14 March 1534 organised in Hamburg to appease the litigants, describes in his account that Wullenwever's henchmen are riotous ("sinen uprorisken kompanen"; Waitz I, 402). The *64-Ausschuss*, too, is described with the same words. At the same Hamburg meeting, a bill of complaint by one of Lübeck's escaped burgomasters, Nikolaus Brömse, is read in front of the attendees. Here he refers to the enlarged board: "dat uproriske regimente der hunderten und 64 muchte bygelecht und gedempet werden" (Waitz I, 392).²¹ In the aforementioned missive by Christian III to Duke Henry V, Christian warns Henry of Lübeck's intentions: "ein gemeine pewerische ufrhur durch die gantze seekant zu erweckenn" (Waitz II, 256).²² On 3 February 1535 it is an emissary from Danzig who uses these words about Wullenwever in a report to Christian III: "denn uproreschen freventlicken beginneren" (Waitz III, 359).²³ Afterwards, during the trial, these words are used more rarely and reappear only when reviewing the facts.

The words *Aufruhr* and *auführerisch* are used quite frequently in relation to Wullenwever, from the time of the Count's Feud onwards. Before that time we find them only referring to Lutherans and citizens who aspired to democracy, and not only in Lübeck. As regards Bremen, the local archive

¹⁸ "This point is suspect to me."

¹⁹ "That in the city of Lübeck he acted as a thief and a traitor."

²⁰ "To slay the hare that sits there [...] that was Mr. Jurgen Wul., the traitor, the evil."

²¹ "That the riotous regiment of the hundred and 64 may be abrogated and suppressed."

²² "To stir up a general riot of peasants along the whole coast."

²³ "The riotous outrageous provoker."

includes many documents about the democratic and Protestant movements that gathered strength in the city much in the same way they did in Lübeck. Here we find words such as “de mothwyllige unde wrevelicke upror” (Waitz III, 356).²⁴ In the previously mentioned account dating to the year 1530, it is said that the popular movement spread similarly in Lübeck: “gelickmetige uproryge handelinge” (Waitz III, 358).²⁵ Even the Protestant preacher Johann Oldendorp was accused of being *auführerisch*: in his self-defence he claims not to be the bloodthirsty riotous upstart and false libeller (“de mordgierigen uprorschen Schandtdichter und falschen Klegere”; Waitz I, 193) that others accused him of being.

6. These documents thus describe Wullenwever as a hot-blooded, unscrupulous but charismatic man. Similarly, if we follow the use of the words *Aufruhr* and *auführerisch*, we notice that along the coasts, from Holland to the Hanseatic cities on the Baltic, and from England to Denmark, the focus shifts from the social and religious question to the political one when the Count's Feud starts. These two words are the most frequently used to describe the age, and they follow historical events: the turning point is the death of Frederick I and the vacant Danish throne. Before that moment, Wullenwever rises and gains consensus with his ‘iron fist’ against Dutch commercial rivals; afterwards Wullenwever's fortunes go into a fast decline. Wullenwever is guilty of defending his adoptive city too strenuously, with the consequence that the community loses all its democratic achievements following the return of the former burgomasters and as a result of a renewed bond with the Emperor.

It was an age of upheaval in which the former powers, the aristocracy and the Church, were undermined by new forces and ideas of democracy conveyed by Lutheranism, which spread among the burghers. The Count's Feud shows that a balance had not been struck yet: Catholics were against Protestants, but the two denominations did not always correspond to definite social and political parties. The widespread use of the words *Freund* and *Feind*, applied to one or another without any clear distinctions, shows that the situation needed to become untangled, even though this limited word choice risked leading to a Manichean outlook on life. Against this background, the career of Jürgen Wullenwever epitomises all the social, religious, economic and political tensions and contradictions of the time.²⁶

²⁴ “The wilful and outrageous riot.”

²⁵ “Similar riotous actions.”

²⁶ I would like to thank Mike King (Down County Museum, Downpatrick, UK) for reading my paper.

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