Summary

Contrary to its role in medieval trade, the Hanseatic League has by now received only little attention as an area of production. On the contrary, hanseatic towns are seen as markets, primarily dedicated to a transit trade with foreign commodities. This view is partly due to the lack of source material, but mainly motivated by the interpretation that the strong mercantile element within hanseatic towns must have led to a suppression of crafts. This thesis challenges this view. It shows that an exporting textile production was widespread throughout the Hanseatic Area.

A close analysis of the London Customs Accounts, the core evidence of this study, has shown that between c. 1350 and the early 15th century, textile production of hanseatic towns developed towards trademarks that represented certain standards of production secured by urban institutions of quality assessment. A comparison with the fragmentary evidence available for other markets confirms this finding for most of the Hanseatic Area. Linens and woolens were produced in the Saxon, Westphalian, Prussian and the Wendish towns. For woolen cloth, these areas of production are supplemented by hanseatic towns in Thuringia and the Netherlands. The textiles produced there were mainly of a mediocre quality, clearly geared towards an increasing consumption of townsmen and peasants.

The evidence discussed in my thesis leads to the conclusion that textile production in the Hanseatic Area played an important role in late medieval textile production and trade. Furthermore, trade in these textiles was by no means restricted to local or regional markets, but constituted a regular part of hanseatic long distance trade. This leads to a reinterpretation of the Hanseatic Area of an area of mere transit trade to a production landscape for late medieval long distance trade. In addition, the Hanseatic League integrated urban production in privilege-based long distance trade and trade policies. Last but not least, an exporting textile production is the first detectable long-term incentive for inland hanseatic towns to participate actively or passively in hanseatic affairs.