

The importance of henry vii's treaties with foreign powers essay sample



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Foreign trade was an important factor throughout the reign of Henry VII as it had a high income. During his time as king Henry increased the annual revenue from foreign trade from i?? 33, 000 to i?? 40, 000. This gave Henry a much needed sense of security, as a usurper of the crown himself, as a rich king is much more secure and safe than a weak king. His foreign treaties not only dealt with vital matters like pretenders and marriages, but also a great deal of imports and exports.

Henry was eager to extend English trade abroad, especially as the activities of the pretenders had exposed weakness upon his dependability on other foreign powers, especially Antwerp. Therefore in 1486, Henry began a new agreement in which the restrictions placed upon Franco-English trade were removed. Although, because of Henry's involvement with Brittany, the French charged higher duties on all English goods imported into France. However, all of these changes were adapted in 1492, under the Treaty of Etaples. The French agreed not to help any Yorkist pretenders and to pay Henry a pension of i?? 5, 000 a year.

England was now recognised by France as a European power and trade between them was encouraged. Also the wine trade that was disrupted by the Wars of the Roses was re-established, but it was not until 1497 the relations were once again returned to normal by the removal of the higher duties. Henry was determined to strengthen his links, both in terms of trade and dynastic interests, with new power Spain. In 1489 The Treaty of Medina Del Campo was partly concerned with the Breton war, Spain probably trying to gain English support against France, but there were also many advantages were gained on behalf of Henry.

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Issues regarding the Navigation Acts were resolved, which opened up new Spanish markets and more opportunities for English trade. It also gave the two countries good relations as an agreement was made that Henry's eldest son, Arthur, would be married to Ferdinand and Isabella's younger daughter Catherine. From then on the two countries received the same rights in each others country, with low duties fixed at an advantageously low rate, although the Spaniards never allowed Henry become as involved with trade as he would have liked.

Margaret of Burgundy was constantly plotting against Henry, supporting pretenders such as Perkin Warbeck and so when Burgundy refused to give up the pretender, Henry placed an embargo upon them. Trade was ceased with Burgundy, as well as the Low Countries, and all Burgundian merchants were banished from England. This action was extremely harmful to English trade but shows us clearly that Henry's safety on the throne and the preservation of his dynasty came before trade matters. Warbeck left Burgundy in 1495, making it easier for Henry and Philip of Burgundy to come to an agreement, ending the trade embargos in 1496.

In 1506, Philip of Burgundy was traveling to Castile when he was shipwrecked at Weymouth. Henry decided to take advantage of this situation and so lavishly entertained his guest for three months. During this time Philip and Henry agreed a treaty, called the ' Malus Intercursus', in which Philip granted special privileges for English ships in Burgundy. However this treaty never came into practice as Philip died suddenly and the treaty was never ratified. At this time, Venice was a major power in Mediterranean trade, limiting the number of trade opportunities for England.

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In a bid to improve the position for his merchants, Henry agreed a treaty with Florence, Venice's biggest rival, in 1490. This allowed the establishment of an English staple at Pisa, the only Italian outlet for English wool, and also restricted English wool sales to Venice. Henry also put heavy import duties on wine brought to England in Venetian ships in 1492. Venice did little to retaliate however, as they were caught up in the Italian wars and had so had little time to fight back. This left English trade in the Mediterranean to increase throughout the rest of Henry's reign.

Besides making treaties with the main trading powers, Henry also made agreements with the smaller ones. In 1489 Henry renewed a treaty with Portugal, encouraging friendship between them as well as Anglo-Portuguese trade. Henry also agreed a treaty with Denmark in 1489. It gave English merchants increased trading opportunities with Denmark and Norway as well as with the rest of Northern Europe. As well as using treaties to expand foreign trade, Henry also used overseas exploration. Henry was prepared to support explorers who believed that a new route to the East could be found by sailing west.

One of these was John Cabot, whom he patronised in his western voyages. This led to the discovery of the Newfoundland and its rich fisheries, giving great trade opportunities for England. Henry also patronised Sebastien, John's son, encouraging his voyage in 1509, exploring North America but when Sebastien returned Henry had died and his son had no interest in exploration. Due to Henry's patronage, England had more knowledge of North America than any other European power, which unfortunately was not

exploited and used to an advantage. Great opportunities for trade were therefore missed.

Wool and Cloth were the principle products for trading in England during Henry's reign. He encouraged two main English companies to take part in this trade; the Merchants of the Staple and the Merchant Adventurers. The Merchant Adventurers were based in London and so Henry did everything he could to persuade them to take advantage of the terms set down by such treaties as the 'Malus Intercursus'. This would hopefully encourage their growth and give them an edge over the Hanseatic League, the most powerful shipping organisation in Europe, which was also based in London.

The Merchants did their best to keep out their rivals, but they ere unsuccessful, so Henry tried other ways of doing so. In 1485 and 1489, Henry with the help of Parliament passed the Navigation Acts. The Acts specified that in certain areas only English ships and English crews could be used to import and export goods. As well as limiting the power of the Hanse, this ensured that Henry had a merchant navy in time of war. Here there was some success, although by the end of 1509, 50% of goods were still moved in foreign ships. Even though it seems that Henry's expansion of overseas trade was an accomplishment, in relation to other foreign powers he was rather unsuccessful.

By the time Henry's reign came to an end England was still not an established trading power in Europe and had had limited successes. To Henry security upon his throne was much more important than expanding trade, we can see this when he attempts to limit the powers of other

countries. Henry had begun the development of English trade and had left it up to his successors to build upon his start. This was something which was done exceptionally well by his granddaughters, Mary I and Elizabeth I, who turned England into one of the greatest trading powers in the world.