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Urban Textiles In Social Context

10-12 September 2009, Tartu, Estonia

The catalyst for this seminar, which was held at Tartu City Museum and organised in conjunction with the University of Tartu with sponsorship from the European Union Regional Development Fund, was the recovery during excavations undertaken in the last ten years of several thousand textiles from cesspits dating from the late 13th to 16th centuries in the Hanseatic town. The aim was to discuss the interpretation of such finds in comparison with those from other cities in northern Europe, particularly as so few documents are preserved relating to medieval Tartu. Participants from Germany, The Netherlands, Poland, Russia and the UK, considered a variety of textile evidence and site complexes from the towns of Elbing, Brunswick, Freiburg, Heidelberg, Lübeck, Lüneburg, London and Groningen. This included information on the cloth trade gleaned from lead cloth seals and an analysis of 236 fabric swatches (each identified by name) on a document dating to 1678 discovered in the state archives in Lüneburg, as well as a consideration of different qualities of textiles in rubbish deposits, for example the town moat at Groningen and a dock infill beside the River Thames in London. Gold embroidery and related manufacturing

evidence from sites in Russia, including Novgorod, dating from the late 10th to 13th centuries provided a tantalising glimpse of what earlier deposits in Eastern Europe might yield.

An exhibition in the City Museum featuring a selection of textiles and textile tools from the excavations in Tartu, including reconstructions of garments, complemented the seminar, and an excellent excursion to a range of sites, museums and churches in southern Estonia took place the following day. The organisers, especially Riina Rammo and Arvi Haak, deserve many thanks for making the seminar such a stimulating and memorable occasion.

