The Wealth and Commerce of Constantinople

The circumference of the city Constantinople is eighteen miles; half of it is surrounded by the sea, and half by land, and it is situated upon two arms of the sea, one coming from the sea of Russia [the Black Sea], and one from the sea of Sepharad [the Mediterranean].

All sorts of merchants come here from the land of Babylon, from the land of Shinar[Mesopotamia], from Persia, Media [Western Iran], and all the sovereignty of the land of Egypt, from the land Canaan [Palestine] and the empire of Russia, from Hungary, Patzinakia [Ukraine],Khazaria [southern Russia], and the land of Lombardy [northern Italy] and Sepharad [Spain].

Constantinople is a busy city, and merchants come to it from every country by sea or land, and there is none like it in the world except Baghdad, the great city of Islam. In Constantinople is the church of Hagia Sophia, and the seat of the pope of the Greeks, since Greeks do no obey the pope of Rome. Thereare also as many churches as there are days of year…. And in this church [Hagia Sophia] there are pillars of gold and silver, and lamps of silver and gold more than a man can count.

Close to the walls of the palace is also a place of amusement belonging to the emperor, which is called the Hippodrome, and every year on the anniversary of the birth of Jesus the empire gives a great entertainment there. And in that place men from all the races of the world come before the emperor and empress with jugglery and without jugglery, and they introduce lions, leopards, bears and wild asses, and they engage them in combat with one another; and the same thing is done with birds. No entertainment like this is to be found in any other land…

From every part of the Byzantine Empire tribute is brought here every year, and they fill strongholds with garments of silk, purple, and gold. Like unto these storehouses and this wealth there is nothing in the whole world to be found. It is said that the tribute of the city amounts every year to 20,000 gold pieces, derived both from the rents of shop and markets and from the tribute of merchants who enter by sea or land.

The Greek inhabitants are very rich in gold and precious stones, and they go clothed in garments of silk and gold embroidery, and they ride horses and look like princes, indeed, the land is very rich in all cloth stuffs and in bread, meat, and wine.

Wealth like that of Constantinople is not to be found in the new whole world. Here also are men learned in all the books of the Greeks, and they eat and drink, every man under his vine and his fig-tree.

(Bentley page 329).

A detail of the Wealth and Commerce of Constantinople…this detail gives us a little idea of the perspective of other people’s impression of trade in Europe’s during the Byzantine Empire and how they influence the outspread of successful trade. The Spanish Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela who ventured through out the world and came across a flourishing city, Constantinople. The people there were wealthy and civilized , imagine how hard such qualities would have been difficult to find back then, they also read all about the Greeks, these men also took care of them selves under there own labor, and this city made the Byzantine a famous and very dominance empire that influenced the further development of some part of Europe.