



Anna of Byzantium

Tracy Barrett

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Anna Comnena has every reason to feel entitled. She's a princess, her father's firstborn and his chosen successor. Someday she expects to sit on the throne and rule the vast Byzantine Empire. So the birth of a baby brother doesn't perturb her. Nor do the "barbarians" from foreign lands, who think only a son should ascend to power. Anna is as dismissive of them as are her father and his most trusted adviser--his mother, a manipulative woman with whom Anna studies the art of diplomacy. Anna relishes her lessons, proving adept at checkmating opponents in swift moves of mental chess. But as she matures into a young woman, her arrogance and intelligence threaten her grandmother. Anna will be no one's puppet. Almost overnight, Anna sees her dreams of power wrenched from her and bestowed on her little brother. Bitter at the betrayal, Anna waits to avenge herself, and to seize what is rightfully hers.

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Anna of Byzantium Details

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From Reader Review Anna of Byzantium for online ebook

Hannah says

Though Anna of Byzantium is interesting and well-written, with vivid characters and moving scenes, I did not like it. Almost all of the characters act from purely selfish motives, using deceit and any means possible to get their desires, so it is difficult to figure out which side is the "right" side, because neither is fully in the right. Much of the story is very sad as it is clearly not written from a Christian worldview, and evil frequently triumphs, even in the end. As the book is not historically accurate, I found no redeeming quality.

Shannan Schoemaker says

Anna of Byzantium - takes the reader on a journey to the court of the Byzantine Empire through the first person female perspective of the heir to the Byzantine throne, Anna Commena, from age four to eighteen. Written by Traci Barrett a typically nonfiction history writer, the court life of the Byzantine Empire comes to life in her first historical fiction novel. Barrett leads the reader through this coming of age tale of the young Anna as she is groomed for the throne by two contrasting personalities: her loving yet intelligent mother and conniving, power hungry, manipulative grandmother. The story is artfully crafted and the narrative takes place as a story Anna is reflecting on and recalling from her past, the reader is informed of Anna's fate at the beginning of the novel which sets the stage for the second narrative, her past. Because of this, although the reader is transported into the past they are still constantly being tugged towards the future and the inevitable outcome.

After being betrayed by her own brother and power-hungry grandmother, Anna is stripped of her right as heir by her father shortly before his own death. Devastated Anna plots revenge and waits for the time to strike and attempt's to seize the throne from her brother, but once again she betrayed by a long time friend and companion, however this time out of love. They do not want Anna to lose sight of her true nature as a kindhearted and gentle woman and become the power hungry creature her grandmother wanted her to become.

I was never bored or anxious to finish the book because the characters were well developed, well written and the character dialogue was excellent, even if it didn't use appropriate syntax and colloquialisms for the time period. More details about the characters lifestyles or personalities other than Anna's, her grandmothers and mothers would have been beneficial to the story-line and made all of the characters and the setting more realistic. However, the development of the main character, Anna, was well done.

Anna's gradual development from emotional, vengeful, vain, and power-hungry to scholarly, accepting and humble was enjoyable. Towards the end of the novel I found myself hoping against hopes that Anna would ultimately succeed and become the strong female ruler she would have been had she maintained the line of succession, however the ending allowed for more personal growth than political since Anna ultimately became an important historical figure due to her writing and work on her own book the Alexiad, a biography of her father's rule of Byzantium a significant historical document in its own right and a unique example of female writing and literacy in the "Dark Ages." A good introduction to the time period, the Byzantine Empire, the Crusades, Female's in history and the art of living life at court.

Jeanette says

It's difficult to give this kind of novel, one with wide appeal to teens or children of the present day, the kind of context it deserves without having very difficult violence and atrocity events dominate the telling. But this author does that (not offending sensibilities of young minds) while making the telling itself, whole piece and contained within a complete and revealing to personalities style. All at the same time in easy read and interesting copy.

She's made Anna an every girl with strong self-identity and a verve of intelligence and personality that is exceptional on all counts. And she describes the Byzantium world of that 11th century to a 4 star or better degree. My only problem is that in this easy read and YA version of historical fiction I always find voids that are little addressed for the types of issues that cannot lay openly exposed for YA sensibilities. Because this time is so very harsh. And often brutal way beyond this telling here. Brutal as the parrot's outcome that bite her brother. And far more often "common" too than in the world that Anna viewed every day at court, and later within her convent historian work world.

This would be a 5 star exposure to past girlhoods and class divisions within those 11th century mores of royalty, succession, and power influences. Sophia's story and also that outcome of Anna's first promised blonde warrior, both of those also include the particular reality of that world. Life and conflict being most ordinarily short, cold, and final. And death from illness quick and often.

Heather says

Genre: Biography

Award: Garden State Teen Book Award (NOMINATED FOR AN AWARD) 2002; Volunteer State Book Award (NOMINATED FOR AN AWARD) 2002

Star Rating: Four Stars

Grade Level: 7-12th grade

Although the vocabulary is relatively simple, the themes of pride, vanity and revenge can reverberate with any age group. The pleasure of reading this short and concise narrative of the life of Princess Anna Comnena is truly to see that there were not exclusively male authors and scholars during the medieval period in history. Anna is an excellent role model for the burgeoning young thinker, whether they are male or female.

Summary: *Anna of Byzantium* is the gripping and emotional retelling of the life of an underappreciated princess in an often ignored period of history. Anna was raised to be the Empress of Byzantium as rule was passed from ruler to whomever they picked to follow in their stead, not necessarily their eldest son or child, as was the more common practice in the rest of Europe. She was trained in the classics, by her teacher Simon and in politics, diplomacy and governing by her grandmother, who was also her father's most trusted advisor and regent in his absence.

This seems to be her inevitable, but not dissatisfying future, until the birth of her brother John and her foolhardy actions that displease her grandmother. So she fell from the grace of her father and his throne, as she had been warned by her teacher Simon that her pride would make her fall much like Icarus and his wax

wings. Anna is a patient woman though and waits for the moment to strike her brother and regain what was rightfully hers; however she is betrayed by those she trusts the most and imprisoned for her crime.

Evaluation: Tracy Barrett, the author, has done extensive research in the lives and times of a number of medieval women writers, among them the Byzantine princess Anna Comnena. She explains in her author's note that, although the real Anna Comnena lived from 1083 to 1153 and she was to have assumed the throne upon the death of her father, the emperor, as stated in the biography, some of her life story has been fictionalized. Ms. Barrett states, "I have changed some of the facts of the story, mostly by compressing the period in which the events took place, eliminating some characters, and inventing others." She then goes on to explain explicitly what details were modified, including the number of Anna's siblings, Anna's marriage to her betrothed, and the supporting characters that were works of fiction. Otherwise, the book is accurate to the details of Anna's life, as I discovered from reading her entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica, upon completion of the novel.

Her biography is relevant to young adults today, as it is so surprising to find a woman of such intellectual means in a period of supposed intellectual darkness. The biography is free from bias and is not patronizing to the reader. Anna's voice is clear and very modern, which should appeal to young adults. The content is up-to-date, as the research Ms. Barrett did was completed as recently as the year 2000. Her story is complete and objective; with language and dialect that reflects the Byzantium Empire of that time and the tone and voice of a princess. The very construct of the a woman scholar and writer from this time period is in and of itself controversial, not to mention the fact that she was the heir apparent to the throne of the wealthiest empire in Europe/Asia Minor at this time. Ms. Barrett deals with the construct of Anna with delicacy neither debunking her nor placing her on a pedestal. Although, there is not a bibliography of sources, endnotes, footnotes or a list of recommended readings included there are special features such as a period map and family tree of the Byzantium royal family.

Description of the ending: *Anna of Byzantium* has a closed ending. The conclusion is reassuring and the problem is solved. Although, Anna does not gain the crown in her failed attempt to usurp her brother, she does not live without solace in her monastical "prison." For the remainder of her life she works on transcriptions of histories and mythology and the story of her father *The Alexiad*

Suggestions: I am seriously considering teaching this in conjunction with *Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as there are so few documented examples of women writers from the medieval period. Thus, my students will be allowed to identify the characteristics of various literary genres, movements and critical approaches. It would also enable them to analyze text from a feminine perspective.

Read Aloud: I nodded assent, and Theodora left, reappearing a few minutes later with her hymnal. She turned to a page marked "April 1: Mary the Egyptian," and I read:

"You severed the temptations of the soul and the passions of the body with the sword of temperance; the crimes of the mind you choked with the silence of spiritual discipline, and wit the streams of your tears you watered the entire desert, and made to grow in us the seeds of repentance: therefore we celebrate your memory, holy one."

I admired the warlike imagery of the opening. I know all about fighting my passions as though in a battle. At the bottom of the page was the name Kassia. (Pg. 196)

"What do you think, Simon?" I asked. "Should I forgive?"

As usual, he answered with a story. "Do you remember the tale of King Thyestes? He stole the throne of Mycenae from his brother, Atreus, by a trick and then committed adultery with Atreus' wife. Atreus pretended forgiveness and invited Thyestes to a banquet. After Thyestes and dined richly on a stew, Atreus

revealed to his that he had eaten his own children. . . . You see, Little Beetle? Once it starts it doesn't stop."(Pg. 167)

"It is not strange for me to live her now, in this community of women. Unlike some of the degenerate western countries of which I have read, and whose representative s I met during the Crusade, the women of Byzantium do not mix with men. We have own palaces, or at least our own apartments in a larger palace. The little boys stay with the women until they reach the age when they need training in arms, and then they move to the men's quarters." (Pg. 23)

Small Review says

Engaging. It was nice to read about a person and period that are less popular. Full review to come.

Originally posted on Small Review

Yikes, Anna! Talk about your family drama. Backstabbing, coups, attempted coups—Anna's family doesn't play around.

Anna is a strong, confident character who is easy to root for (but would probably make an awful sleepover party friend). She reminded me of Isabella in her steadfast determination and "take no prisoners" attitude. This is a good thing and I definitely raged alongside her whenever she was wronged.

Even though there are a few liberties with the historical timeline (probably to make it more MG appropriate) and this tale is definitely told from Anna's extremely biased perspective, this is still a great historical primer. Highly recommended, especially for fans of the Royal Diaries series.

Originally posted on Small Review

Katherine says

3.5 out of 5 stars

Well after two DNF's in a row, it's about darn time I liked and finished a book.

Lada could take a few tips from Anna as well.

Review coming soon!!!

J. says

I admit, I had never heard of this book before. The cover isn't particularly flashy--neither is the title, nor the jacket copy. Considering all this, it feels like a minor miracle that I read this book at all. I saw it on a library shelf and had been wanting to read more historical YA, and I don't know a lot about the Byzantine Empire besides the survey look from World History and AP Euro, so I wanted to give it a try. I thought I might give

up on it early on.

To my surprise, it's a lot more engaging than the cover, title, or jacket copy led me to believe. I should've trusted the publisher; the book was clearly not published for mass-market appeal, after all. The first chapter didn't grab me immediately, and I don't usually like frame narratives (here, you start near the end and then stay in the past as Anna tells you how she got there, until the end). But I found that it worked really well here. Barrett's language is simple but evocative, and she did a good job making me care for the characters.

Even Anna, I was doubtful about in the beginning. I didn't relish the idea of reading a book about someone who is wronged and wants revenge, but the ending had better closure than I thought, and the ending was more satisfying than I believed possible from where it looked like it was heading.

I didn't expect any romance, and this is by no means a book I'd categorize as romance, but I really enjoyed the hints of it. (view spoiler)

Overall, if it's not a book I imagine myself returning to, it is still a lovely historical account that nevertheless sweeps you up in a good story, and resolves fairly well, all within only about 200 pages.

Anajoy-rusticgirl says

Part of the back/Partly mine:

Anna Comeni is a princess, her father's first born and his chosen successor. Someday she expects to sit on the throne and rule the vast Byzantine empire. The birth of a baby brother doesn't perturb her. Nor do the 'barbarians' from foreign lands, who think only a son should ascend to power. Anna is as dismissive of them as are her father and his most trusted advisor-his mother, Anna Dalassena, a manipulative woman with whom Anna studies the art of diplomacy. Anna relishes her lessons, proving adept at checkmating opponents in swift games of mental chess. But as she matures into a young woman her arrogance and intelligence threatens her grandmother. Anna will be no ones puppet. Almost overnight 'thanks to a loose sentence speaking to a friend, and her sneaking brother spying' Anna sees her dreams of power wrenched from her and bestowed on her little brother. Bitter at the betrayal, Anna waits to avenge herself and seize what is rightfully hers.

Shannon says

Every now and then, a book falls into your hands at just the right time. Last week, I went to a Medieval Treasures exhibit at the Frist Center and yesterday I read Anna of Byzantium. The temporal setting is not exactly the same: Anna's Byzantium is 1083, a few hundred years before most of the art I enjoyed. But this book, written during a time when literacy was a gift, not a given, made me think about many of the same issues I pondered as I looked at illuminated manuscripts in glass cases.

Anna is the eldest daughter of Constantine, the Emperor of Byzantium. She is bright, confident and enjoys

learning. Her learning comes via a personal tutor and her grandmother, who helped her father seize the throne years ago.

This book has family angst (Anna and her brother take sibling rivalry to a whole new level), intrigue (will Anna follow her mother's gentle lead or her grandmother's conniving one?) and history aplenty (Venetian ambassadors, Crusades).

As an added bonus, it's a young adult book, so it's a quick read and there's no sex or violence. If you'd like to spend an enjoyable afternoon in Constantinople (not Istanbul), spend it with Anna of Byzantium.

booklady says

I've always been fascinated with the Crusades. Seven years ago when I did my own mini-study of them I remember running across the name Anna Comnena as a frequently quoted eleventh century Byzantine historian. Although I never completed that study due to homeschooling requirements, I also never forgot about Anna and always wanted to learn more about her.

This young adult novel is a fictionalized version of Anna's early life at court in the last days of her father, Alexius I Comnenus. Anna adored her strong, powerful father and beautiful mother. Contrary to western customs, her father could and had designated her as his rightful heir. But Anna was also intelligent and young--a dangerous combination when power and a throne are at stake.

For a first novel, this is absolutely incredible! I look forward to more great historical fiction by Ms. Barrett! I cannot recommend this book highly enough to all teachers and homeschooling parents as an excellent book for the 4th through 6th grades.

Thanks again Krista for another great tip!

Jess says

This story succeeds in bringing to life the court of the Byzantine emperor in the 11th century - a setting that I don't think I've encountered before, particularly in a children's book. You get the sense that Barrett knows her history well, and she's chosen a character and period that seem rich and fascinating. Instead of playing Anna as a sympathetic every-girl, Barrett shows her as someone truly born to the purple, taught to rule from an early and keenly aware of what is her due. While this was refreshing and rang of historical accuracy, I never quite connected to the story in any way - I would've liked something a bit more in-depth, maybe. Still, I would recommend it to anyone interested in the period, or anyone looking for historical fiction taking place outside of western Europe.

I forgot to note that the book has a pleasantly in-depth author's note in terms of what she fictionalized and what is true. Also, I think the cover is pretty fab and has held up well in the 10 years since it was published. I couldn't help but wish, though, as the book highlighted differences between succession and rule in the East versus the West, that it had also played up some of the religious differences. Apart from a few mentions of hymns (in that wonderfully familiar style), the religious characters and the convent where Anna is sent could have just as easily been (disappointingly) Western. Bah.

Sid says

When my english teacher told me we were going to read this book, I was like Ohooooooooo SHINY. When I started reading it I realized Anna liked to complain. A lot.

She complained.

And complained.

And complained some more.

All she talked about was that she wanted to kill her baby brother. (and she tried to. She was 5 when this happened.)

OMG IS THIS WHAT HAPPENS IN HISTORY?

P Dreadful says

See full review here: <https://mostlywaffle.wordpress.com/20...>

I usually avoid books which are written in first person, but this one was different. The prose is elegant without being too ornate and Anna's character is drawn well. She is a flawed character (she is impetuous, proud and ill-tempered) but it makes the reader empathise with her more. I understood her need to acquire what was her birth-right. I couldn't help but root for her even though I knew that she would never be the Empress of Byzantium. Her fall was spectacular and was nothing short of tragic. Although this book does not deal with military aspects of the First Crusade fought during her lifetime and it does not have layers the way *Pride of Carthage* does, it does transport you to Anna's Byzantium. Nevertheless, the book is so full of factual errors that it made me curious about the author's sources (which are not listed). This book might not appeal to serious readers of Byzantine history, but it is a well-written book. It is just not historically accurate.

Natalia says

Anna of Byzantium transports the reader back to the time of the Byzantine empire through the perspective of the young heir to the throne, Anna Comnena. This book offers an intimate look at the inner workings of the royal family, including all the politics and work required by just being a royal. *Anna of Byzantium* was written by Tracy Barrett and was first published in 1998. It was her first novel and was received well. Barrett leads the reader through young Anna's life as she is prepared for her duties as the future empress. Her whole world turns upside down when the throne is ripped out from underneath her by the hands of her power-hungry grandmother and younger brother. Plotting revenge, Anna waits for the right time to seize the throne and take back what is rightfully hers. The subsequent themes of pride, vanity, and revenge recur throughout the novel.

Barrett uses a frame-narrative to describe what's happening in the story. A frame narrative is essentially a story within a story. In this case, Anna's fate is introduced at the beginning of the novel to set the stage for a more emphasized second narrative. The reader stays in the past and learns of the events leading up to the end of the story with the ending already in mind. This technique worked well with the story and helped build suspense and empathy for the characters.

The story kept my interest throughout the novel. I never felt bored or anxious to get the book over with; I can genuinely say I enjoyed it. The characters were well developed and the ending of the story satisfied me. If there is one thing I could change, it would be more involvement and development of supporting characters. The princess only interacted with them when necessary, and there weren't many details about their lifestyles or personalities. Other than that, I felt that the development of the main character, Anna, was well done. I believe the story to be historically accurate. I appreciated that at the end of the story, the author specified what exactly she had changed from fact to fiction.

The intended audience for this book is middle and high schoolers. I myself am a high schooler, and I can say that Barrett did a wonderful job delivering a complex and interesting story from a time that isn't frequently talked about. Anna's development from vengeful, vain, and power-hungry to accepting, aware, and humble was enjoyable and relatable. At the beginning her sense of entitlement was irritating, but I found myself rooting for her towards the end. This is the mark of good storytelling. I found the book easy to navigate and enjoyable to read. I would recommend this book to a friend and I plan on reading it again.

“Laurie Henderson says

Anna Comnena was the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor, Alexios. Born in 1083, she was the author of *The Alexiad*, which told of her father's reign and still regarded as an important source of information for that era.

This YA book about Anna's life was an informative and quick read for anyone interested in learning more about the Eastern Roman Empire.

Princess Anna was the first born child and was viewed from the beginning as her father's successor. She was given a rigorous education which included astronomy, history, geography, math and military affairs.

The brilliant Anna was a scholar, physician and hospital administrator as well as an historian. But her heart was broken when she was 13 with the birth of her brother John, who would replace her as heir to the throne.

Anna would spend the next years of her life trying to regain her position as heir, even resorting to a plot to murder her younger brother upon the death of her father.

The plot was discovered and Anna forfeited her estates. She had married at the age of 14 and had 4 children. Upon the death of her husband she would enter a convent where she would dedicate the rest of her life to the study of history, philosophy and writing her famous book.

Anna was a fascinating woman whose works are still read today.
