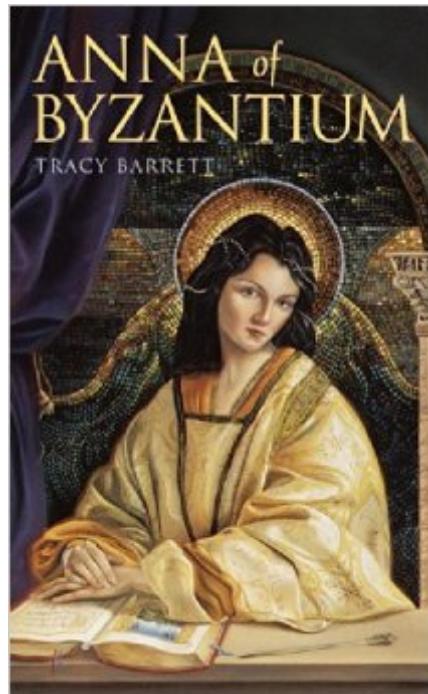


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# Anna Of Byzantium (Laurel-Leaf Books)



## Synopsis

For fans of Joan of Arc and Alexander the Great, comes "a gripping saga of alliances, intrigues, deceits, and treacheries" about Anna Comnena of the Byzantine Empire. 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. Praise for *Anna of Byzantium*: A Bulletin Blue Ribbon Book An ALA Quick Pick An ALA Best Book for Young Adults A Booklist Editor's Choice A Booklist Top Ten Historical Fiction Pick [STAR] "[*Anna of Byzantium*] involves readers in a gripping saga of alliances, intrigues, deceits, and treacheries worthy of a place among the tragic myths." The Bulletin, Starred review "In the tradition of E. L. Konigsburg's *A Proud Taste for Scarlet and Miniver* and Karen Cushman's *Catherine, Called Birdy* comes this story of a real-life historical figure, Anna Comnena, groomed to be the sovereign of the Byzantine empire." Barrett uses an effective first-person narrative to draw readers into Anna's story, and the author's precise use of detail helps re-create Anna's world, the palace of Constantinople in the ninth century. . . Readers will be caught up in this exciting read." Booklist, Boxed review "A fascinating mix of history, mystery, and intrigue." -The Horn Book Magazine "Barrett does a remarkable job of painting moods and emotions with spare, elegant sentences. . . This splendid novel about a neglected period of history is the perfect choice. . . Hard to imagine it being any better written." VOYA "This wonderfully engaging novel both entertains and serves as a lively history lesson with its well-researched background, dramatic plot and dimensional characters. Barrett's descriptive, engaging prose will draw readers into a fascinating historical time, filled with political intrigue and a complex, admirable teen protagonist who faces her changing future with an inspiring combination of heart and mind." Wichita Eagle

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

This story by Ms. Barrett is a good, but seriously flawed fictional account of the life of Anna Comnenus, a Byzantine princess during the medieval era. For those who like fiction with no connection to reality, (and the plethora of fantasy titles, sci-fi and other 'historical fiction' tampering with the past on the market today, is a pretty good indication of such!) this is a noble effort, that comes very close to the real thing, but fails at the very point at which it could have made a good novel, a great one. The author's very good pacing of her storyline, her evocation of some of the elements of a Greco-Roman society, are all well executed- it is clear she is a respected writer (the American Library Association gave it awards, as did Booklist and Bulletin). But the reality of an [Greek] Orthodox culture and the suffusing of that faith in an overtly Christian realm that endured for over 1000 years, are completely missing in Barrett's novel- as are the realities of how deeply intertwined the Christianity of the Apostles and the Greek culture's dependence on them would have more than deeply influenced not only a royal such as Princess Comnena, but the entire court, far more than Barrett envisioned. The plot strikes me more as a 'junior Lucretia Borgia' than a Byzantine monarch's first-born heir. What I mean is this: the intricacies of plotting, revenge, murder, poisoning and all the rest that were a hallmark of the Borgias- and Italian, Papal culture (including some Popes whose offices were bought and paid for by Borgia money!) are in far shorter supply in the Byzantine records, and are by and large totally foreign to an Orthodox phronema [mindset]. Not that they did not exist, mind you!

Anna of Byzantium tells the story of the rising and falling fortunes of Anna Comnena, a princess of the Byzantine Empire, and heir to the throne. The plot includes friendship, betrayal, power struggles, an assassination attempt, love, manipulation, and sibling rivalry, and is a fascinating glimpse into the political and family turmoil that Anna may have been caught up in. There were a lot of things about this book that were wonderful. I really enjoyed the author taking on the challenge of writing a book about the Byzantine Empire. I don't know of any other children's or teens' authors who have used this setting, and it's a unique and interesting glimpse into life in this era. The plot twists kept me reading to see how everything would turn out. I had very mixed feelings about the characterization, though. Some of the characters were really well drawn and elaborated, and I really appreciated the author's ability to portray the ways that both positive and negative character traits could be intertwined in the same person. On the other hand, though, there were several characters that were key to the plot but were not well characterized at all. For example, John, Anna's younger brother, appears as a pretty flat, inept, selfish, weak, and spoiled character throughout most of the book, and there doesn't seem to be a lot of nuancing of his character. At one point in the book however (won't give too much away) his behavior seems pretty strongly contradictory to this, and the historical note at the end of the book describes him in a way that seems inconsistent with both presentations of him.

Anna Comnena thought she would achieve immortality as Empress of Byzantium, but when her father named her younger brother, John as his heir, she was forced to change her career plans. This fictional biography casts light on a profoundly neglected corner of our past: the history of the Eastern Roman Empire, founded by Constantine the Great in 330 AD and finally brought to an end by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The heroine of this book, born in 1083 AD, was the eldest child of the Emperor Alexius I, and received an education as befitted a future empress. As a child, Anna was betrothed to Constantine Ducas, a distant relative of her mother. When he died, she eventually married Nikephoros Bryennios and they had four children together (not in this book, though.) Anna's paternal grandmother, Anna Dalassena was the effective administrator of the Empire during the long absences of Alexius I in war campaigns. The old woman was constantly at odds with her daughter-in-law Irene (Anna Comnena's mother) and assumed total responsibility for the upbringing and education of her granddaughter. This book characterizes the grandmother as a ruthless, tyrannical, paranoid old woman who had a falling out with her ambitious, rather unlikeable granddaughter and caused her to be disinherited. The 'real' Anna Comnena says this of her

grandmother in her "Alexiad:" "My father reserved for himself the waging of wars against the barbarians, while he entrusted to his mother the administration of state affairs, the choosing of civil servants, and the fiscal management of the empire's revenues and expenses. One might perhaps, in reading this, blame my father's decision to entrust the imperial government to the gynaeceum [women's quarters].

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