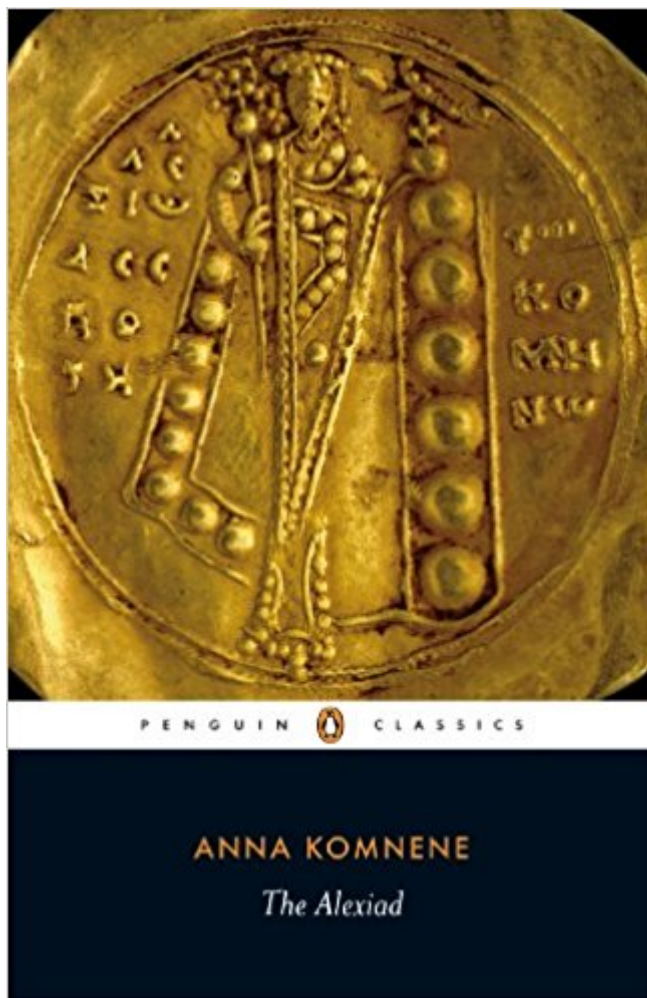


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The Alexiad (Penguin Classics)



Synopsis

A revised edition of a medieval masterpiece—the first narrative history written by a woman. Written between 1143 and 1153 by the daughter of Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, *The Alexiad* is one of the most popular and revealing primary sources in the vast canon of medieval literature. Princess Anna Komnene, eldest child of the imperial couple, reveals the inner workings of the court, profiles its many extraordinary personages, and offers a firsthand account of immensely significant events such as the First Crusade, as well as its impact on the relationship between eastern and western Christianity. A celebrated triumph of Byzantine letters, this is an unparalleled view of the glorious Constantinople and the medieval world. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

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Customer Reviews

E. R. A. Sewter was a well-known Byzantine scholar and the editor of *Greece and Rome*. His translation of *The Alexiad* of Anna Komnene is still published in Penguin Classics. He died in 1976.

The translator does an excellent job and Anna seems quite candid in her writing.

I picked up this book after reading the Minimum Wage Historian's write-up of Anna Komnene in *Fearless: Powerful Women of History*. I'm really not sure what I was expecting. If you're a scholar or hugely interested in Byzantine history around the 11th century, then this is a good choice, full of battle facts and city locations. Otherwise, it's pretty slow reading. There are some bits that are interesting insights into the character and views of the author herself (which is rare and interesting, considering when she wrote her history) but unfortunately, most of the book is a very dry recitation of facts.

As 12-century Byzantine histories go, this is a heavy read with its repetitions and religious invocations. And yet it's also fascinating because this history written by Byzantine princess Anna Comnena (born in the purple, as she won't let you forget) provides a unique insight in the history of Byzantium seen from within. They felt they were the Roman Empire, and looked down on Western Europeans ('Franks') for their greed, duplicity and aggression, at best with 'noble savage' clichés that Europeans themselves have since been using for other groups. There are always wars going on, be it with the Turks, the Normans encroaching from Southern Italy or even the Crusaders. From this history, it transpires that many crusaders were just keen to conquer any territory, Byzantine or Saracene. I came away from this book with a deeper understanding of the various nuances of the word 'Byzantine': religiosity bordering on fanaticism, cruel palace intrigues (I lost count keeping track of how many people got their eyes gouged out when they fell out of favour) and shrewd double-timing diplomacy in a turbulent world.

Without situating this documentation in its historical as well as its human context it will not be taken seriously. But its flaws are understandable, given its reference, a daughter compiling the military and political history of her father's reign as Byzantine emperor during a sensitive moment in Roman and Christian history. Important to have as much background as possible in order to appreciate the work accomplished here by a woman who claims a proper education as an historian, yet is really dependent on a variety of sources which do not necessarily coincide. The editor has done an excellent job in revising the text and modernizing the wording.

A little heavier than I thought.

Great book written originally in Ancient Greek by Princess Anna Comnene. Anna Comnene gives an account of the reign of her father, Alexios I, whom she compares with the great Illyrian Emperor, Constantine the Great. The Roman Empire (which is nowadays considered as the Byzantine Empire) is being attacked on the west, in Illyricum (Illyria) by the Normans (a third of the book), and on the east by the Turks. Anna gives us insights on the political mind of her father. Alexios is trying to solve his problems through diplomacy rather than war. But he uses all his cards, diplomatic alliances with the Germans and Italians, and Turks, and open war if necessary. It is clear that Anna writes from a Christian point of view showing great respect for her father as emperor and mother as queen, and her Grandma has a special place in her heart as well. Her portrayal of different historical characters is very interesting. It's as if she is building a monument or a statue with words right in front of our eyes. Some descriptions of the battles are so vivid, that you can describe this writing as cinematic. Her love of literature is marvellous and contagious. Overall a great read. The reason why we love royals is because deep down we want to be them. I would recommend this book to my best friends and to everybody.

The Alexiad is a great incite into what was happening around the Byzantine Empire at the time.

Excellent translation!!

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