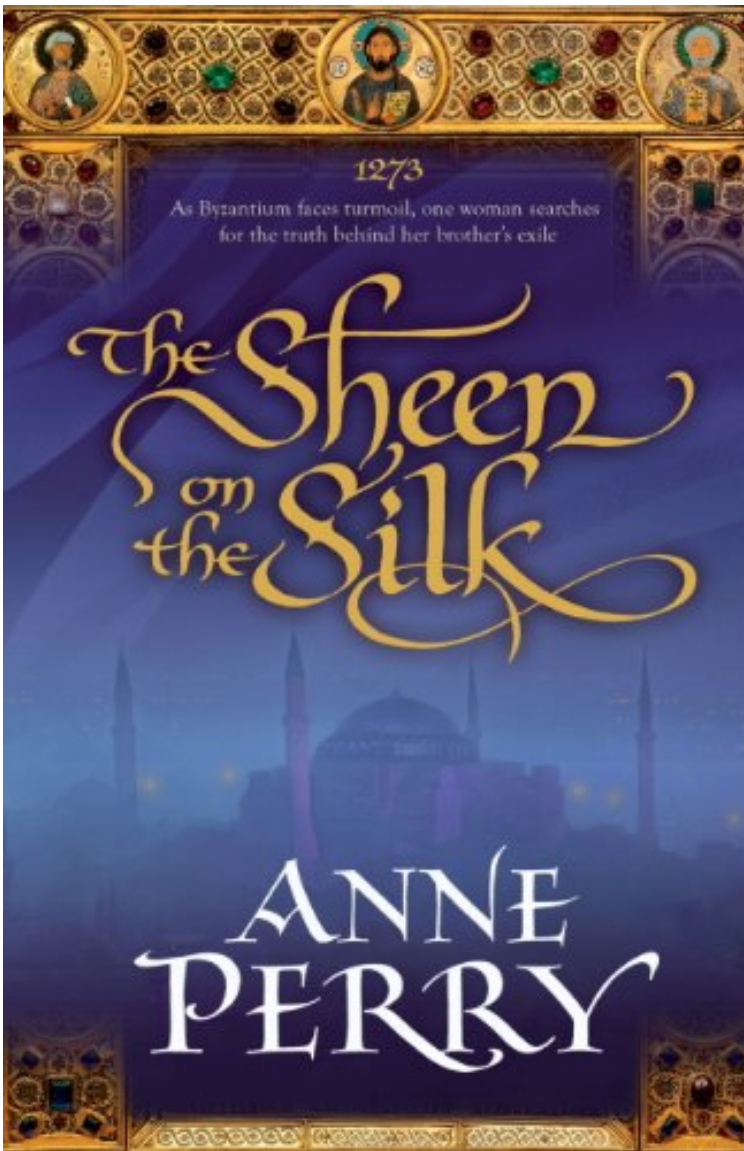


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The Sheen on the Silk: An epic historical novel set in the golden Byzantine Empire (English Edition)



Par Anne Perry
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**Par Anne Perry : The Sheen on the Silk: An
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur Amid the danger of political turmoil, Anna moves within circles of intrigue and murder... Anne Perry's The Sheen on the Silk is an epic historical novel with a heart-stopping love story at its core, set in the gorgeous, cosmopolitan and enlightened city of Byzantium, in the twilight years of its Empire. Perfect for fans of C.J. Sansom and Susanna Gregory. 'Remarkable . . . [Anne Perry sets] an

engaging personal story against a rich backdrop of events to convey the intrigue and extreme peril that characterized the struggles between the faiths of the countries bordering the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century' - Star-Ledger1273 - the gorgeous, cosmopolitan and enlightened city of Byzantium is in acute danger. Only an alliance with the Church of Rome will stop the crusading fervour of the Italian and French troops on its borders, determined to strike through Byzantium to reach Jerusalem. Faced with the prospect of surrendering its gentile Orthodox theology to Roman Catholicism, the city is in turmoil as opposing factions seek to assert their authority. For Anna, the brutal conflict only echoes her own life. Recently arrived in Byzantium to find out why her brother has been exiled for a murder she believes he did not commit, Anna is forced to pose as a eunuch so that she can move freely in all levels of society. As she does so she finds herself in the middle of intrigues that may not only free, or condemn, her brother, but will also determine the fate of Byzantium itself. What readers are saying about *The Sheen on the Silk*: 'The setting was magnificent' 'The Byzantine court, its people and its problems both internal and international make for an intelligent and unputdownable read' 'Well written, good story lines, well plotted, and characters that immediately engaged my interest and sympathies' Extrait

One Anna Zarides stood on the stone pier and gazed across the dark waters of the Bosphorus toward the lighthouse of Constantinople. Its fires lit the sky with a great beacon outlined against the paling March stars. It was beautiful, but she was waiting for the dawn to show her the city's rooftops and, one by one, all the marvelous palaces, churches, and towers she knew must be there. The wind was chill off the waves, whose crests were only barely visible. She heard the sound of them sucking and hissing on the pebbles. Far away on the promontory the first rays of daylight caught a massive dome, a hundred, two hundred feet high. It glowed a dull red, as if with its own inner fire. It had to be the Hagia Sophia, the greatest church in the world, not only the most beautiful, but the heart and soul of the Christian faith. Anna stared at it as the light strengthened. Other rooftops grew clearer, a jumble of angles, towers, and domes. To the left of the Hagia Sophia she saw four tall, slender columns, like needles against the horizon. She knew what they were, monuments to some of the greatest emperors of the past. The imperial palaces must be there, too, and the Hippodrome, but all she could see were shadows, white gleams of marble here and there, more trees, and the endless roofs of a city larger than Rome or Alexandria, Jerusalem or Athens. She saw the narrow stretch of the Bosphorus clearly now, already growing busy with ships. With an effort she made out the vast battlements of the shoreline, and something of the harbors below them, crowded with indistinguishable hulls and masts, all riding the safe calm within the breakwaters. The sun was rising, the sky a pale, luminescent arch shot with fire. To the north, the curved inlet of the Golden Horn was molten bronze between its banks—a beautiful spring morning. The first ferry of the day was making its way toward them. Worried once again how she would appear to strangers, Anna walked over to the edge of the pier and stared down at the still water in the shelter of the stone. She saw her own reflection: steady gray eyes, strong but vulnerable face, high cheekbones, and soft mouth. Her bright hair was jaw length, not dressed and ornamented like a woman's, and with no veil to hide it. The ferry, a light, wooden boat big enough to carry half a dozen passengers, was less than a hundred yards away now. The oarsman was fighting the stiff breeze and the perverse currents, treacherous here at the narrows where Europe met Asia. She took a deep breath, feeling the bandages tight around her chest and the slight padding at her waist that concealed her woman's shape. In spite of all her practice, it still felt awkward. She shivered, pulling her cloak closer. "No," Leo said from behind her. "What's wrong?" She turned to look at him. He was tall, slender-shouldered, and round-faced, with hairless cheeks. His brow was furrowed with anxiety. "The gesture," the eunuch replied gently. "Don't give in to the cold like a woman." She jerked away, furious with herself for making such a stupid mistake. She was endangering them all. "Are you still sure?" Simonis asked, her voice brittle. "It's not too late to . . . to change your mind." "I'll get it right," Anna said firmly. "You can't afford mistakes, Anastasius." Leo deliberately used the name Anna had chosen to take. "You would be punished for masquerading as a man—even a eunuch." "Then I mustn't get caught," she said simply. She had known it would be difficult. But at least one woman had succeeded in the past. Her name was Marina, and she had entered a monastery as a eunuch. No one had known differently until after her death. Anna nearly asked Leo if he wished to go back, but it would be insulting, and he did not deserve that. Anyway, she needed to observe and mimic him. The ferry reached the dock and the oarsman stood up with the peculiar grace of one accustomed to the sea. Young and handsome, he threw a rope around the stanchion, then stepped up onto the boards of the dockside, smiling. About to smile back, Anna remembered not to only just in time. She let go of her cloak, allowing the wind to chill her, and the boatman passed by her to offer his hand to Simonis, who was older, plumper, and obviously a woman. Anna followed, taking her seat in the ferry. Leo came last,

loading their few boxes, which held her precious medicines, herbs, and instruments. The oarsman took his place again and they moved out into the current. Anna did not look behind. She had left everything that was familiar, and she had no idea when she would see it again. But it was only the task ahead that mattered. They were far out into the current now. Rising sheer from the waterline like a cliff was the wreckage of the seawalls breached by the Latin crusaders who had looted and burned the city seventy years ago and driven its people into exile. She looked at it now, soaring up as vast as if it had been built by nature rather than man, and wondered how anyone could have dared to attack it, never mind succeeded. She held on to the gunwale and twisted in her seat to look left and right at the magnitude of the city. It seemed to cover every rock face, inlet, and hillside. The rooftops were so close, they gave the illusion you could walk from one to another. The oarsman was smiling, amused at her wonder. She felt herself coloring at her naiveté and turned away. They were now close enough to the city that she could see the broken stones, the thready outlines of weeds, and the darker scars of fire. She was startled how raw it looked, even though eleven years had passed since 1262, when Michael Palaeologus had led the people of Constantinople back home from the provinces where they had been driven. Now Anna too was here, for the first time in her life, and for all the wrong reasons. The oarsman strained against the wash that rocked them hard as a trireme went past, bound for the open sea. It was high-sided, three tiers of oars dipping and rising, water running bright from their blades. Beyond it were two other boats almost round, men busy furling their sails, scrambling to lash them fast enough so they could let down anchor in exactly the right place. She wondered if they had come from the Black Sea and what they had brought to sell or trade. In the shelter of the breakwaters, the sea was calm. Someone somewhere laughed, and the sound carried across the water, above the slap of the waves and the cry of the gulls. The ferryman guided their way to the quayside and bumped gently against the stones. She paid him four copper folles, meeting his eyes for no more than a moment, then rose and stepped ashore, leaving him to assist Simonis. They must hire transport for the boxes, then find an inn to offer them food and shelter until she could look for a house to rent and set up her practice. She would have no help here, no recommendations as she would have had from her father's good name at home in Nicea, the ancient, magnificent capital of Bithynia across the Bosphorus to the southeast. It was only a day's ride away, yet Constantinople was a new world for her. Apart from Leo and Simonis, she was alone. Their loyalty was absolute. Even knowing the truth, they had come with her. She started along the worn stones of the quayside, making a path between bales of wool, carpets, raw silk, piles of crockery, slabs of marble, exotic woods, and smaller bags that gave off the odors of exotic spices. Heavy in the air were also the less pleasant smells of fish, hides, human sweat, and animal dung. Twice she turned around to make certain Leo and Simonis were both still with her. She had grown up knowing that Constantinople was the center of the world, the crossroads of Europe and Asia, and she was proud of it, but now the babel of alien voices in among the Byzantines' native Greek, the teeming, anonymous busyness of it, overwhelmed her. A bare-chested man with gleaming skin and a sack across his shoulders weighing him down bumped into her and muttered something before staggering on. A tinker laden with pan and kettles laughed loudly and spat on the ground. A turbaned Muslim in a black silk robe walked by without a sound. Anna stepped off the uneven cobbles and crossed the street, Leo and Simonis close behind. The buildings on the landward side were four or five stories high and the alleys between them narrower than she had expected. The smells of salt and stale wine were heavy and unpleasant, and the noise even here made speaking difficult. She led the way up the hill a little farther from the wharveside. There were shops to left and right, living quarters above apparent from the laundry hanging from windows. A hundred yards inland, it was quieter. They passed a bakery, and the smell of fresh bread made her suddenly think of home. They were still climbing upward, and her arms ached from carrying her medical supplies. Leo must be even more exhausted because he had the heavier boxes, and Simonis carried a bag of clothes. She stopped and let her case drop for a moment. "We must find somewhere for tonight. At least to leave our belongings. And we need to eat. It is more than five hours since breakfast." "Six," Simonis observed. "I've never seen so many people in my life." "Do you want me to carry that?" Leo asked, but his face looked tired and he already had far more weight than either Simonis or Anna. In answer, Simonis picked up her bag again and started forward. A hundred yards farther, they found an excellent inn that served food. It had good mattresses stuffed with goose down and was furnished with linen sheets. Each room had a basin large enough for bathing...*Revue de presse* With her visionary sensibility, Anne Perry is the master of the you are there school of hist-myst storytelling. *The New York Times Book Remarkable . . .* [Anne Perry sets] an engaging personal story against a rich backdrop of events to convey the intrigue and extreme peril that characterized the struggles between the faiths of the countries bordering the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century. *The Star-*

Ledger[Perry] gives the reader a real feel for the sights, sounds and smells of Constantinople in the time of the Crusades, as well as tastes of Venice, Rome, Sicily, and Jerusalem. St. Louis Post-Dispatch Perry escalates the tension in subtle ways [and] creates a deep sense of impending doom. Dayton Daily News [A] grandly scaled epic . . . with a canny eye for drama, [Perry] makes this complex historical background both vivid and clear. Kirkus sFrom the Trade Paperback edition.