
Ariana Franklin

City of Shadows

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Q: Why did you choose to make the character of Franzisca Schanskowska the centerpiece of *City of Shadows*? What drew you to the great Anastasia debate?

A: I am always fascinated by frauds and Schanskowska was fraudulent, literally, on a grand scale. DNA has proved that she couldn't have been Anastasia. What is interesting is I'm pretty sure she'd convinced herself that she was the lost Romanov—I used to be a newspaper reporter and covered some big murder trials in which the accused had obviously made himself/herself really believe he/she was innocent, though the proof was damning. The ability of the mind to fool itself is extraordinary.

Q: Anna is obviously based on the real-life Anna Anderson and you write that the other characters are merely fictitious creations. However, were any of the other characters in the book based in any small way on figures you had read about or researched? How much research did you conduct into the experience of Russian expats in Nazi Germany?

A: A lot. I am lucky enough and old enough to have been taught as a schoolgirl in England by a Russian Jewish refugee who had fled Berlin and the Nazis just in time. There are biographies of others too, and, most atmospheric of all, the stories of Christopher Isherwood and Graham Greene.

Q: Why do you think so many people are still so interested in the story of Anastasia and the fate of the grand duchesses?

A: Doesn't everybody love to think that a brand was plucked from that terrible burning?

Q: Was post-war, pre-Nazi Berlin really as decadent and liberal as the book depicts? What about the era allowed such an atmosphere to exist and did you see the Nazi movement as a direct challenge to it?

A: If anything, I think I've underplayed the anything-goes atmosphere of the time. Germany had suffered massive losses in the Great War, like its enemies, and the old ideas of honour, obedience, and patriotism had gone out of the window. In fact, disillusion affected all the countries that had taken part in that awful conflict. And I think it was the other way round—that the tolerant liberalism of the Weimar Republic challenged those who, like Hitler, still believed in the old shibboleths. The trouble was that the huge war debt, combined with the effects of the Wall Street Crash, undermined the administration so bad economically that the let's-get-rid-of-the-Jews-and-make-the-trains-run-on-time-and-all-will-be-well of the Nazi propaganda became the straw that impoverished Germans clutched at.

Q: Do you plan on writing any more novels set in post-war Germany?

A: I'd like to, it's such a heart-wrenching time; you can see the shadows coming and, even while wondering at them, understand the mistakes that landed the world in yet another Armageddon.