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THE SAINT OF ORLÉANS: HER LEGACY

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Western Civilization

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Jeanne d’Arc\(^1\) never existed outside of history books. The Jeanne d’Arc of today – the saint who fought to liberate France during the Hundred-Years War, the convicted heretic burned at the stake – only superficially resembles the historical figure of Jeanne. The name d’Arc did not even exist until the Renaissance.\(^2\) Still, Jeanne’s image as an ancient warrior hero, an example of Divine will, or a symbol of French nationalism permeates today’s culture. How did this historical dynamism manifest in a young woman who was in the public eye for a short two years? Did Jeanne truly represent the values that society placed on her during her life and in the years following her death? Jeanne’s writings and testimony indicate that she was motivated by God and country alone.\(^3\) Her incarnations as a savior, violent heretic, feminist, nationalist, and saint are therefore solely a function of the time in which they were written and served the purpose of the writer rather than reflecting Jeanne’s person, motivation, and actions.

Jeanne was France’s savior. That cannot be disputed. The civil war that recommenced in 1411 between the Burgundians and the Armagnacs was complicated by the English invasion of France in 1415. The English, under the control of King Henry V, allied themselves with the Burgundians and captured most of northern France, including Paris, by 1419.\(^4\) Recognizing that they were fighting a losing war, French King Charles VI and Queen Isabelle renounced their son’s claim to the throne and signed their country away to Henry V in the Treaty of Troyes. Both kings died two years later, in 1422. Henry VI, an infant, was proclaimed king of England and France. The dauphin of France, nineteen-year-old Charles VII, became leader of the Armagnacs. Though he was an infant, Henry VI inspired more loyalty than Charles VII. Many in France

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\(^1\) There are many ways of writing Jeanne’s name. The most common are Jeanne d’Arc (French) and Joan of Arc (English). This paper uses the Jeanne spelling.


believed that Charles was weak and lacked initiative in his quest to regain his country. His efficacy as a ruler has been debated by historians, but everyone in his time, including Jeanne, believed he needed help.6 This was Jeanne’s mission: to return France to its king, Charles VII.

Jeanne was born in disputed territory. Her little town of Domrémy was split by the River Meuse; the west bank was “French” (or belonging to the Valois king, Charles VII), the east bank was Burgundian.7 Her father being a local leader, and her godmother the mayor’s wife,8 Jeanne was born into a position of slight privilege, though her family was still of the peasant class. Domrémy’s proximity to the disputed Anglo-Burgundian border meant that Jeanne often saw the results of the war firsthand. Her father’s involvement in local politics meant that she was even more educated about affairs of state than the typical peasant. However, she lived a fairly normal life until the age of thirteen.

Almost all of what is known about Jeanne’s youth was revealed either by herself during the trial that condemned her for heresy in 1431, or by her neighbors and family from Domrémy who testified at the trial that nullified her conviction in 1456. As a youth, Jeanne “liked working”, “undertook all sorts of jobs”, and did everything “gladly”.9 She was the middle child of five, and her education consisted solely of lessons from her mother, who “taught her the Pater Noster, Ave Maria, and Credo.”10 Jeanne was illiterate, but was very proud of her skill in sewing. Interestingly, she was often referred to as a shepherdess by nobles in Charles’s court11, however, when “asked if she took the beasts to the fields” during the trial that would condemn her for heresy, “she replied that…since she had grown up, and had reached years of discretion, she had

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7 Smith, 11-12. See appendix, Figure 1.
9 Fraioli, *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War*, 98.
10 Gies, 21
11 Fraioli, *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War*, 61.
not herded them.”12 This early depiction of Jeanne reveals the inclination of Charles’s nobles to discredit her. A shepherdess was of low social status, and therefore believed to be less intelligent and discerning than those of a higher status. It is true that Jeanne was a simple girl who lived a simple life, until she began hearing voices.

Jeanne’s extraordinary story began when she was approximately thirteen years old (she herself did not know her precise age). It was at this time when she first heard the famed and controversial voices. Again, most of the information about these encounters comes from the Condemnation Trial, though there are some reports from Charles VII’s theologians, who questioned the validity of Jeanne’s revelations at Poitiers before they allowed her to lead an army. In her own words, Jeanne first heard the words of St. Michael in her father’s garden at noon. Though she was “much afraid”, she immediately knew that it was “a worthy voice…sent by God…the voice of an angel”.13 At first, the voices told her no more than that she should be pious, but Jeanne soon received the message for which her voices are known. They told her to “come to help the King of France”.14 After protesting that she was “only a poor girl, who knew nothing of riding or of leading in war”, she was convinced by the voices, and began planning her departure in secret.16 In the spring of 1428, when she was approximately sixteen years old, she asked her thirty-five year-old cousin-in-law to take her to Vaucouleurs17 to see Robert de Baudricourt, the king’s captain and provost.18 Thus began the long and difficult struggle for Jeanne to prove her legitimacy.

12 Smith, 12.
13 Gies, 23
14 Régine Pernoud, Joan of Arc: By Herself and Her Witnesses, 31.
15 Régine Pernoud and Edward Hyams state that Joan must have known how to ride a horse simply because that was the locomotion of the time. The word that Joan used for “ride” more closely translates into Latin as equitare, which means to ride a warhorse.
16 See Appendix, Figure 2.
17 Gies, 30
When Jeanne arrived in Chinon, she had already won the approval of the men chosen to escort her to the dauphin. One of her company, Bertrand de Poulengy, stated that “it seemed to me that she was sent by God…always was she so virtuous a girl that she seemed a saint”\textsuperscript{19}. However, convincing the king, his courtiers, and his religious advisors of her divine mission would be a much greater challenge. There were two main obstacles to her claim. The first was that she was a woman who wanted to go into battle as a man, wearing armor and fighting from horseback. The second was that she was lowborn and therefore easily duped. However, Jeanne convinced them through her honesty, earnestness, and intelligence. Charles VII was at first contemptuous of Jeanne’s mission.\textsuperscript{20} However, she was easily able to pick him out of a crowd when he was disguised as a courtier. She insisted on a private audience, then somehow persuaded him to trust in her legitimacy. To this day, no knowledge of the content of this encounter has appeared.\textsuperscript{21} Even after Charles was convinced, he knew he could not endorse her mission without the approval of the religious authority in his court.\textsuperscript{22} Charles sent Jeanne to Poitiers, where a school of theology had been established, and where she was interrogated by doctors of theology.

Jeanne was met with extreme skepticism, but a few prophecies greatly aided her case. The first is one that Jeanne herself referenced as evidence of her legitimacy. She asked her cousin in-law, “Was it not said that France would be ruined through a woman, and afterward restored by a virgin?”\textsuperscript{23} The woman was interpreted as Queen Isabelle, who had signed the Treaty of Troyes and given France to Henry VI. Jeanne, who had been told by the voices to

\textsuperscript{19} Pernoud, 39-40
\textsuperscript{20} Fraioli, \textit{Joan of Arc: The Early Debate}, 7.
\textsuperscript{21} Smith, 51-55
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid. 18.
\textsuperscript{23} Fraioli, \textit{Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War}, 98.
remain chaste, saw herself as the virgin. Another, told to Charles VI, originated with a mystic known as Marie of Avignon. Her vision of “pieces of armor…that a Maid who would come after her would wear…and deliver the kingdom of France from its enemies” was told at the rehabilitation trial. Though it was not mentioned in the written record of Marie’s revelations, the fact that a witness at the trial mentioned it indicates that it was ubiquitous enough to influence public opinion. Lastly, an ancient prophecy from King Arthur’s Merlin was hugely influential in legitimizing Joan’s case. It stated that a virgin would emerge from the oak forests of Lorraine to perform marvelous acts and save France. A reference to the Maid’s hidden virginity was interpreted as her riding in armor, which assuaged Charles’s counselors’ concerns.

After spending March and April at Poitiers, the theologians sent Jeanne to Orléans on her word alone. Their blessing was lukewarm, stating that “in view of our urgent need and the peril of the city of Orleans, the king might well make use of [Joan] and send her to that city”. Though the theologians had become convinced of her piousness, they were as yet concerned about her assertion of a divine mission. However, Jeanne had argued, “I have not come to Poitiers to give signs. But take me to Orleans and I will show signs why I am sent”. She was given permission to free the besieged city of Orléans as her first miracle, just as she requested. The theologians also allowed Jeanne to broadcast the message that she was sent by God. Her first act was to dictate a letter to the English, as she was unable to write herself. The language is hers, however, and it betrays much about her character. It was a military summons, often issued as a simple declaration of war to establish the date and time of a battle. However, Jeanne’s Lettre

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25 Gies, 35
27 Fraioli, Joan of Arc: The Early Debate, 64.
30 Lucie-Smith, Joan of Arc, 81
31 Ibid, 74.
32 Fraioli, Joan of Arc: The Early Debate, 54-57
aux Anglais (Letter to the English), goes far beyond the normal summons. It is a fourteen-point letter that details how and why Jeanne was going to remove English forces from France. The letter is addressed to the King of England, not to the King of England and France, as Henry VI referred to himself. Jeanne prefaces all the names of the commanders with “who call yourselves”, undermining their titles and showing contempt for their roles. She demands that they “give to the Maid [Jeanne]…the keys to all the good villages that you have taken and violated in France” and “go to [their] country”, reiterating that France was not the property of Henry VI. Jeanne makes it clear that she is sent by God, and will “hold [France] for the king Charles, the real inheritor, because God, the King of the Sky, wishes it”.  

This summons displays Jeanne in all of her commanding glory. She is combative yet merciful, stating that “she [Jeanne] is full ready to make peace, if you will give way to her”. Her demands are direct, and she clearly articulates the consequences of whatever action the English will take. This indicates her trust in herself as a military commander, and more importantly, her trust that her God will be on her side. The letter betrays a confidence and ease that is surprising in a young woman with no previous military experience, and is a testament to Jeanne’s strength of character.

Jeanne and her army broke the siege of Orléans in ten days. She then escorted Charles to Reims for his coronation. Jeanne was given a place of honor at the coronation, standing beside the altar to indicate her central role in its occurrence. Soon after the coronation, Charles began to search for a diplomatic end to the war with England, angering Jeanne. She left Reims in August of 1429 with a company of men, headed for Paris to continue the fight against the

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36 Smith, 56
37 Fraioli, Joan of Arc and the Hundred Year’s War, 90-100.
38 Ibid.
British. After suffering her first loss at Paris, Jeanne was captured by the Burgundians in Compiègne. The Burgundians sold her to the English, and she was put on trial as a heretic. In 1431, one year after her capture, Jeanne was burned at the stake for relapsed heresy. The tragic end of Jeanne’s short life gave birth to a legacy of differing interpretations of her character, role in the war, and her legitimacy as a prophet.

Jeanne likely would have faded from the public consciousness after her capture at Compiègne if it had not been for Charles giving her a very visible mark of his esteem: a coat of arms. His fate was irrevocably intertwined with hers, as she had won his crown for him. Charles’s legitimacy as a monarch was largely reliant on Jeanne’s religious mandate, so when she was taken into custody and tried as a heretic, Charles was caught in a political nightmare. He had to order the Nullification Trial, although it took him a while to come to that conclusion.39 This trial was therefore the exact opposite of the Condemnation Trial, overseen by Charles’s theologians with the express purpose of clearing Jeanne’s name. Thus, much of the information we have on Jeanne is heavily biased, either toward her condemnation or toward her rehabilitation.

Jeanne saw herself as a vehicle for what she believed was God’s plan, which was to restore Charles to the throne of France and recapture the land lost to the English. Jeanne’s use of the word Pucelle, meaning maid or virgin (generally both – it was assumed that a maid would be a virgin), to refer to herself is consistent in all her writings and testimony. Jeanne’s attachment to this title likely stems from her promise to the voices that she would remain chaste. It indicates her complete dedication to her mission and her role in the fate of France. Her use of this title also supports her preference to be semi-anonymous. This aversion to personal fame and glory is

manifested several times in Jeanne’s life. When Charles gave her family a coat of arms to thank Jeanne for her service, the gesture was embraced by her brothers but reviled by Jeanne herself. She rejected her brothers’s ego-centric acceptance of this coat of arms, and her family’s new noble surname, “du Lys”, preferring to remain *la Pucelle*. Jeanne states in her *Lettre Aux Anglais* that she is “sent by God”. It is clear that her belief in her divine mission kept her from seeking any personal glory. She told the Bastard of Orléans, whom she fought with, that “I bring you better succor than has reached you from any soldier or any city: it is succor from the King of Heaven. It comes not from love of me but from God himself”. Jeanne clearly believed that all she did was in the service of God. She saw her successes as a direct cause of God’s intervention, never taking credit for herself.

Jeanne justified her mission in simple terms. A king needs a kingdom, as a king is a vassal of God. Therefore, God wants Charles to have France and for Henry to have England. Jeanne always believed her mission was about justice, not revenge. She had no pity for her enemies, but she offered salvation to those who obeyed her command. Her *Lettre* warns the English armies that if they do not “go away into [their] country…expect news of the Maid who will come to see you shortly, to your very great injury”. Jeanne was a pious, humble girl who effectively led armies and inspired men to fight for her cause. However, from the moment she wrote the *Lettre Aux Anglais* and made her public debut, she has been painted in innumerous lights, few of which reflect the person Jeanne said she was.

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42 Fraioli, *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Year’s War*, 61.
43 Pernoud, *Joan of Arc*, 70.
Before Jeanne even wrote the *Lettre Aux Anglais*, the French government needed to explain that a woman was going to be leading the siege of Orléans wearing a man’s armor. The secret that Jeanne had told Charles at Chinon was broadly publicized, and she quickly became a figure for the liberation of France.\(^4^4\) Three days after Jeanne rode into Orléans on April 29, 1429, relieving part of the city from its siege, “those of Orléans wanted so greatly to see her that they almost broke down the door of the mansion where she was lodged, to see her”.\(^4^5\) She had not even liberated all of Orléans, yet she was their savior. Jeanne’s power over the common people was undeniable, and even a “hostile witness” admitted that she was called “the angelic one”, and that they “invented songs and fables about her”.\(^4^6\) The fact that a person who disliked Jeanne could give her such glowing accreditation is a testament to her widespread popularity. Even in hostile circles, Jeanne was accepted as a saint to the people of France.

Jeanne was perhaps even more effective in instilling strong loyalty in the soldiers who followed her. The Duke of Alençon, who fought many battles by Jeanne’s side, wrote that “Joan…in the matter of war…was very expert, in the management of the lance as in the drawing up of the army in battle order and in preparing the artillery”. Louis de Coutes, a soldier, related that “in general nobody in the army dared, before her, swear or blaspheme for fear of being by her reprimanded”.\(^4^7\) This statement demonstrates not just her strong moral center and the morals she enforced within the men of her army, but the power she wielded over their actions. All the soldiers respected her both on and off the battlefield. Jeanne was a commander in total control of her troops. Multiple sources cite her religious devotion, impatience with foul language, and

\(^{4^5}\) Pernoud, *Joan of Arc*, 85.
\(^{4^6}\) Fraioli, *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Year’s War*, 100.
condemnation of extra-marital sex as evidence of her good character, then extoll her military knowledge as that of a seasoned commander. Portraying Jeanne as a pious, militarily competent woman was, of course, in these soldiers’s favor. They would not want to write about how they were following an incompetent or corrupt leader. Additionally, Jeanne had been given the blessing of the King and the Church, and was therefore presumed to be a good choice for her role. This was not a time in which the common soldier would contradict the King, even in private correspondence. Therefore, the positive regard for Jeanne held by her soldiers fits with their purposes.

On the Anglo-Burgundian side, Jeanne’s summons created extreme fright and consternation. A Norman noted that she was “much feared…because she used summonses, and said that if they did not surrender, she would take them by assault”. Though this may seem like the usual course of events for a war, the chronicler portrays Jeanne’s use of summons and her call for surrender as improper and unjust. His negative opinion of Jeanne clearly clouds his description of events. This prejudice is apparent in other accounts from the Anglo-Burgundian side. As her campaign went on, her reputation preceded her, and one soldier observed that “there was not a fortress which did not wish to surrender at her simple utterance and summons”. The fear Jeanne instilled in the rank and file soldiers was not lost on Henry VI, who wrote a letter to the duke of Burgundy, reviling Jeanne for exercising “the inhuman cruelties by shedding Christian blood”. The letter included religious language, refuting Jeanne’s claim to divine inspiration and saying that God would no longer tolerate the “great mischiefs, murders, and

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48 “Camp women”, prostitutes who would travel with the army and sleep with the men, were very common at the time.  
51 Ibid.  
52 Ibid.
detestable cruelties she has committed against our sovereignty, and on a loyal obedient people”.\textsuperscript{53} The fear Jeanne instilled in the Anglo-Burdundian forces allowed Henry VI to paint her as a violent heathen. This portrayal was very expedient to his cause, and greatly aided in condemning Jeanne as a heretic. However, it was baseless. Though reports said that Jeanne was ruthless, she also exhibited extreme mercy. Her own soldiers noticed this, remarking that she always acted out of compassion and justice.\textsuperscript{54}

While Charles’s statesmen were arguing amongst themselves about Jeanne’s legacy, her fame was being preserved in the history of the peasantry by her brothers. Five years after her burning, “Jeanne” appeared in Orléans, in full armor, on a horse led by her brothers. Purported to be saved from burning by a miraculous last minute substitution, this fake Jeanne and her brothers prospered off the kindness of the people of Orléans, given free lodging and delightful bursaries.\textsuperscript{56} The image of Jeanne as a hero who defied death and triumphed over a biased trial expanded her lore and cemented her identity as a girl sent from a higher power. Jeanne’s brothers’ selfish, greedy actions ensured that Jeanne would never be forgotten by the people of Orléans and the peasantry of greater France. Her fame spread throughout France, and during the winter of 1435 in Arras,\textsuperscript{57} Jeanne made an appearance as a snow sculpture, standing at the head of her men.\textsuperscript{58}

Knowledge of Jeanne was essentially ubiquitous in France.

The first report of Jeanne in a creative medium came from Christine de Pizan, an aristocratic and feminist writer of Renaissance Italy. She was a court writer for Charles VI of France, an unusual occupation for a woman.\textsuperscript{59} The last poem Pizan ever wrote, “The Song of

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Pernoud, \textit{Joan of Arc}, 64.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 187-188.
\textsuperscript{56} See Appendix, Figure 3.
\textsuperscript{57} Fraioli, Joan of Arc and the Hundred Year’s War, 69.

Joan of Arc”, written in 1429, is the first example of Jeanne being extolled as a feminist figure. Pizan, the first official female court historian for France, and an advocate for women’s rights in a time of severe oppression, turned to many strong women in history as proof of women’s ability to be equal to men. She portrays the triumph of Jeanne as a triumph of womanhood. “The Song of Joan of Arc” hails Jeanne and her role in the victory at Orléans. A section of Pizan’s poem reads:

Esther, Judith, and Deborah
Were ladies of great worth
By whom God restored
His people when they were hard-pressed,
And others I have heard of
Who were valiant, none more so,
But many more miracles
Were done by the Pucelle.
Ah, what honor to the feminine sex!
Which God so loved that he showed
A way to this great people
By which the kingdom, once lost,
Was recovered by a woman,
A thing that men could not do.60

By setting the word “woman” in opposition to “man” in the last two lines of the poem, Pizan attributes Jeanne’s ability to save France to her femininity, not her connection to God. This portrayal of Jeanne’s success fits perfectly with Pizan’s narrative of female empowerment. Of course, Jeanne never saw herself as a feminist revolutionary. When the voices asked her to save France, she protested by citing difficulties that arose not because she was a girl, but because she was a peasant, such as her inability to ride a warhorse. Additionally, Jeanne saw her religious mandate as the most important part of her person, taking precedent over women’s dress and

60 Gies, 240
women’s roles. She refused to disobey her voices, sent from God, and in that defied traditions of femininity to her death. This action was not a rebellion against the stereotypes of the time, but a dedication to her God. Jeanne was not unaware of her womanhood either. She used the prophecy stating that France would be saved by a virgin to legitimate her case. However, she never actively worked to include more women in her armies or expand the role she had been granted to other women. In fact, Jeanne often chased women out of camp, because they were often there for prostitution rather than to fight. As a feminist figure, Jeanne is an example of a woman shattering the expectations of her time, but no more than she was a peasant shattering the expectations of her time. Pizan’s portrayal of Jeanne as a feminist figure continued into the modern day.

Jeanne also came back into the political consciousness of France during the Renaissance. To challenge the newly rich merchant class and legitimate their claim on power, many nobles found tenuous connections to historical figures who earned nobility. In 1612, a noble family called “du Lys” petitioned the King to take over the coat of arms given to Jeanne’s family. They were granted this request, though there is no evidence to suggest that family was actually descended from Jeanne’s brothers. The large family kept the myth of Jeanne alive, extolling her virtues to strengthen their claim on money and power. It is clear from Jeanne’s rejection of the “du Lys” name when her brothers used it that she would not appreciate the use of her name to gain fame and power.

Over two decades later, in 1841, the first historical biography of Jeanne was published by Jules Michelet, a firm patriot, republican and anticlerical. Written during a French-Anglo conflict in the Middle East, Michelet’s portrayal of Jeanne as a valiant commoner fighting for her mother country is unsurprising. The subsequent 19th century biographies of Jeanne written by French

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61 Warner, 194.
62 Gies, 253
historians took the same secular, republican position as Michelet.\textsuperscript{63} Ironically, Jeanne’s mission was to save the king, not the nation, and these biographers were not living in a monarchy. Jeanne’s so-called patriotism was irrelevant for a secular France. Michelet’s nationalistic interpretation quickly spread from scholarship to propaganda, regardless of Jeanne’s partiality to royalty. In 1878, a French republican newspaper was published with large portraits of Jeanne and Voltaire entitled “Patriotism” and “Tolerance”.\textsuperscript{64} Jeanne was portrayed as a national heroine fighting for her country’s liberty. The article ascribed Jeanne’s death to the Catholic Church, not to the English.\textsuperscript{65} Though this representation fit nicely with the anti-Catholic sentiments of the time, it contradicted every aspect of Jeanne’s life.\textsuperscript{66} Jeanne was motivated solely by her religion.

The excitement around Jeanne extended even to politics. In 1888, the Mayor of the 7\textsuperscript{th} arrondissement of Paris proposed \textit{la fête civique de Jeanne d’Arc}, or the civic holiday of Jeanne d’Arc. Supported by both believers and unbelievers, the bill was accepted in 1892.\textsuperscript{68} This is the power of Jeanne’s legacy: she can be used as an example for both the nationalist and religious sides of a political battle, but she can also be a symbol that brings those sides together. However, when examining these portrayals of Jeanne as compared to her convictions, the religious group has a stronger argument for using her image. Jeanne became a figure of nationalism through her faith. The faith was primary, and the nationalism secondary.

Finally, Jeanne was portrayed as a saint, the portrayal perhaps most pertinent to her motivations while she lived. However, even this designation was not free from political intrigue. Socialist party gains in the French elections of 1893 made clerical groups apprehensive, and they

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{64} Gies, 251.  
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 238.  
\textsuperscript{68} Warner, 264.
began petitioning the Vatican to saint a woman who combined French nationalism and Catholicism. In an attempt to curtail the French Catholics drifting toward socialism and atheism, Pope Leo XIII declared Jeanne Venerable in 1894. Jeanne’s promoters were unsatisfied, still worried about the future of their religion in France, and pressured Pope Pius X to designate Jeanne as Blessed in 1909. One debate stood in the way of full canonization. Was Jeanne’s commitment to God paramount over all else, or was her heroism intended for the earthly world? The devil’s advocate case, as the argument against canonization is known, was overthrown and Pope Benedict XV canonized Jeanne in 1920. This move was very important for the French clergy to show that French nationalism and Catholicism were indeed intrinsically related. 

Though Jeanne may have also believed this precept, the fact remains that the French clergy petitioned the Vatican to canonize her to save themselves, rather than to altruistically honor her memory.

There was one point in time when the judgments of Jeanne were not entirely self-serving. The analysis of the theologians at Poitiers was an attempt to gather facts, without the prejudice of trying to prove a point. France needed a savior, and legitimizing Jeanne as soon as possible would have been politically and militarily preferable. Even Jeanne recognized this, stating, “I am not come to Poitiers to make signs; but take me to Orléans, I will show you the signs for which I have been sent”. However, the religious nature of Jeanne’s mission meant that it needed a longer examination. In fact, a belief at the time dictated that the longer a person was delayed from a mission that was covertly Satanist, the more likely the evil would appear. Additionally, legitimizing Jeanne was dangerous for the church. If she was not really sent by God, if she was

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70 Warner, 264.
71 Fraioli, *Joan of Arc and the Hundred Years War*, 62.
not really a virgin, and if she was unable to deliver France from the English, then the judgment of the church would have failed. Therefore, though the theologians were trying to retain their own authority, they did so through seeking the whole truth, rather than a biased version of Jeanne’s story. Clearly, they were at least somewhat successful, since Jeanne did drive the English out of France, fulfilling the mission she said she received from God. Unfortunately, much of the documentation from Poiters has been lost, so this most unbiased of many biased reports is incapable of informing on Jeanne’s life and person.73

This paper has largely relied on impressions of Jeanne drawn from the transcripts of the condemnation trial attended by Jeanne herself, the nullification trial attended by people who knew her, and the letters Jeanne dictated. Unfortunately, the veracity of these sources is unclear. Jeanne herself admitted that she would not necessarily tell the truth to the court. When told to “swear to speak the truth on all that will be asked of you concerning matters of the faith and that which you know”, Jeanne responded, “I will willingly tell you whatsoever I have received permission from God to reveal.”74 The notary at the Condemnation Trial, Guillaume Manchon, wrote that fraudulent practices occurred in the records of the trial. When he “set down in writing the Maid’s answers and excuses, sometimes the judges tried to constrain me, by translating into Latin, to put into other terms, changing the meaning of the words or, in some other manner, my understanding (of what had been said).”75 Given that these trial proceedings are the source of the bulk of scholarly knowledge about Jeanne, contemporary knowledge of Jeanne is flawed.

Even the letters Jeanne “wrote” were not written in her own words. Jeanne could not read or write; she dictated these letters to scribes who would change words or adjust phrasing as they

73 Gies, 53
74 Pernoud, Joan of Arc, 46-47.
75 Ibid, 171.
pleased. When an inquisitor at the Condemnation Trial asked Jeanne, “what as the purpose of that sign which you put on your letters and those names: Jhesus-Maria?” Jeanne responded that “the clerks who wrote my letters put it and they said that it was fitting to put those two names: Jhesus-Maria.” The fact that Jeanne was unable to control her own words in the only form by which they could last into perpetuity emphasizes the dubious historical accuracy of her story. However, nearly all secondary sources referenced in this paper marvel at the sheer volume of contemporary writing devoted to one individual. For what documentation on Jeanne lacks in accuracy, it makes up for in volume and vitality.

Jeanne saw herself as a maid, come to save France and return the throne to Charles, all in the name of God. The French portrayed her as a divine savior, the English portrayed her as a violent heretic, and she has represented feminism, nobility, and nationalism ever since. Jeanne’s story has morphed and been appropriated so many times that some stories about her are pure fiction, without intending to be. Is it so bad though, that the name “d’Arc”, given to Jeanne in the 16th century, conjures an image of a bow, placing Jeanne in a legacy of female archers? Her usefulness as a symbol of female strength overshadows the historical inconsistencies of a medieval woman with a bow. Knowing the history of something, as objectively as possible, is always valuable. However, perhaps the life that Jeanne led is not important to a study of her person. It is in examining her remembrances that her true character can be revealed. After all, it is within the imagination and memory of the people where Jeanne d’Arc lives on.

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76 Ibid.
77 Warner, 198-199.
Appendix

Figure 1: France in Jeanne’s Time (with Domremy)

Source: "Beginnings", Saint Joan's Photo Album.

Figure 2: A Close-Up of Jeanne’s France

Figure 3: France in Jeanne’s Time (with Arras)

Bibliography


