

# Joan of Arc

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**Joan of Arc** is a national heroine of France and a Catholic saint. A peasant girl born in eastern France, she led the French army to several important victories during the Hundred Years' War, claiming divine guidance, and was indirectly responsible for the coronation of Charles VII. She was captured by the Burgundians, sold to the English, tried by an ecclesiastical court, and burned at the stake when she was nineteen years old. Twenty-four years later, on the initiative of Charles VII, who could not possibly afford being seen as having been brought to power with the aid of a condemned heretic, Pope Callixtus III reviewed the decision of the ecclesiastical court, found her innocent, and declared her a martyr. She was beatified in 1909 and canonized in 1920. She is one of three patron saints of France.

Joan asserted that she had visions from God that told her to recover her homeland from English domination late in the Hundred Years' War. The uncrowned King Charles VII sent her to the siege at Orléans as part of a relief mission. She gained prominence when she overcame the dismissive attitude of veteran commanders and lifted the siege in only nine days. Several more swift victories led to Charles VII's coronation at Reims and settled the disputed succession to the throne...

The Hundred Years' War had begun in 1337 as a succession dispute to the French throne with intermittent periods of relative peace. Nearly all the fighting had taken place in France, and the English use of *chevauchée* tactics had devastated the economy. The French population had not recovered from the Black Death of the previous century and its merchants were cut off from foreign markets. At the outset of her career, the English had almost achieved their goal of a dual monarchy under English control and the French army had won no major victory for a generation. The French king at the time of Joan's birth, Charles VI, suffered bouts of insanity and was often unable to rule. The king's brother Duke Louis of Orléans and the king's cousin John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, quarreled over the regency of France and the guardianship of the royal children. This dispute escalated to accusations of an extramarital affair with Queen Isabeau of Bavaria and the kidnappings of the royal children. The matter climaxed when the Duke of Burgundy ordered the assassination of the Duke of Orléans in 1407. The factions loyal to these two men became known as the Armagnacs and the Burgundians. The English king, Henry V, took advantage of this turmoil to invade France, winning a dramatic victory at Agincourt in 1415, and capturing northern French towns.[5] The future French king, Charles VII, assumed the title of Dauphin as heir to the throne at the age of 14, after all four of his older brothers died. His first significant official act was to conclude a peace treaty with Burgundy in 1419. This ended in disaster when Armagnac partisans murdered John the Fearless during a meeting under Charles's guarantee of protection.

The new duke of Burgundy, Philip the Good, blamed Charles and entered into an alliance with the English. Large sections of France were conquered.

In 1420, Queen Isabeau of Bavaria concluded the Treaty of Troyes, which granted the French royal succession to Henry V and his heirs in preference to her son Charles. This agreement revived rumors about her supposed affair with the late duke of Orléans and raised fresh suspicions that the Dauphin was a royal bastard rather than the son of the king. Henry V and Charles VI died within two months of each other in 1422, leaving an infant, Henry VI of England, the nominal monarch of both kingdoms. Henry V's brother, John of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Bedford, acted as regent.

By the beginning of 1429, nearly all of northern France and some parts of the southwest were under foreign control. The English ruled Paris, while the Burgundians controlled Reims. The latter city

was important as the traditional site of French coronations and consecrations, especially since neither claimant to the throne of France had yet been crowned. The English had laid siege to Orléans, which was the only remaining loyal French city north of the Loire. Its strategic location along the river made it the last obstacle to an assault on the remainder of the French heartland. On the fate of Orléans hung that of the entire kingdom...

Joan was the daughter of Jacques d'Arc and Isabelle Romée in Domrémy. Her parents owned about 50 acres of land and her father supplemented his farming work with a minor position as a village official, collecting taxes and heading the local watch. They lived in an isolated patch of northeastern territory that remained loyal to the French crown despite being surrounded by Burgundian lands. Several local raids occurred during her childhood and on one occasion her village was burned.

Joan said she was about 19 at her trial, she was born about 1412; she later testified that she experienced her first vision around 1424 at the age of 12 years when she was out alone in a field and heard voices. She had said she cried when they left as they were so beautiful. She would report that Saint Michael, Saint Catherine, and Saint Margaret told her to drive out the English and bring the Dauphin to Reims for his coronation. At the age of 16, she asked a kinsman, Durand Lassois, to bring her to nearby Vaucouleurs where she petitioned the garrison commander, Count Robert de Baudricourt, for permission to visit the royal French court at Chinon. Baudricourt's sarcastic response did not deter her. She returned the following January and gained support from two men of standing: Jean de Metz and Bertrand de Poulengy. Under their auspices, she gained a second interview where she made a remarkable prediction about a military reversal near Orléans.

Robert de Baudricourt granted her an escort to visit Chinon after news from the front confirmed her prediction. She made the journey through hostile Burgundian territory in male disguise. Upon arriving at the royal court she impressed Charles VII during a private conference. He then ordered background inquiries and a theological examination at Poitiers to verify her morality. During this time Charles's mother-in-law Yolande of Aragon was financing a relief expedition to Orléans. Joan petitioned for permission to travel with the army and wear the equipment of a knight. She depended on donated items for her armor, horse, sword, banner, and entourage. Her armor was white.

During the five months of siege before her arrival, the defenders of Orléans had attempted only one aggressive move and that had ended in disaster. On 4 May the French attacked and captured the outlying fortress of Saint Loup, which she followed on 5 May with a march to a second fortress called Saint Jean le Blanc. Finding it deserted, this became a bloodless victory. The next day she opposed Jean d'Orleans at a war council where she demanded another assault on the enemy. D'Orleans ordered the city gates locked to prevent another battle, but she summoned the townsmen and common soldiers and forced the mayor to unlock a gate. With the aid of only one captain she rode out and captured the fortress of Saint Augustins. That evening she learned she had been excluded from a war council where the leaders had decided to wait for reinforcements before acting again. Disregarding this decision, she insisted on assaulting the main English stronghold called "*les Tourelles*" on 7 May. After she sustained an arrow wound to her neck she but returned wounded to lead the final charge.

| **The sudden victory at Orléans** led to many proposals for offensive action. The English expected an attempt to recapture Paris or an attack on Normandy. In the aftermath of the unexpected victory, she persuaded Charles VII to grant her co-command of the army with Duke John II of Alençon and gained royal permission for her plan to recapture nearby bridges along the Loire as a prelude to an

advance on Reims and a coronation. Hers was a bold proposal because Reims was roughly twice as far away as Paris and deep in enemy territory.

The army recovered Jargeau on 12 June, Meung-sur-Loire on 15 June, then Beaugency on 17 June. The Duke of Alençon agreed to all of Joan's decisions. Other commanders including Jean d'Orléans had been impressed with her performance at Orléans and became her supporters. Alençon credited her for saving his life at Jargeau, where she warned him of an imminent artillery attack. During the same battle she withstood a blow from a stone cannonball to her helmet as she climbed a scaling ladder. An expected English relief force arrived in the area on 18 June under the command of Sir John Fastolf. The battle at Patay might be compared to Agincourt in reverse. The French vanguard attacked before the English archers could finish defensive preparations. A rout ensued that devastated the main body of the English army and killed or captured most of its commanders. Fastolf escaped with a small band of soldiers and became the scapegoat for the English humiliation. The French suffered minimal losses.

The French army set out for Reims from Gien-sur-Loire on 29 June and accepted the conditional surrender of the Burgundian-held city of Auxerre on 3 July. Every other town in their path returned to French allegiance without resistance. Troyes, the site of the treaty that had tried to disinherit Charles VII, capitulated after a bloodless four-day siege. The army was in short supply of food by the time it reached Troyes.

Reims opened its gates on 16 July. The coronation took place the following morning. Although Joan and the duke of Alençon urged a prompt march on Paris, the royal court pursued a negotiated truce with the duke of Burgundy. Duke Philip the Good broke the agreement, using it as a stalling tactic to reinforce the defense of Paris. The French army marched through towns near Paris during the interim and accepted more peaceful surrenders. The Duke of Bedford headed an English force and confronted the French army in a standoff on 15 August. The French assault at Paris ensued on 8 September. Despite a crossbow bolt wound to the leg, Joan continued directing the troops until the day's fighting ended. The following morning she received a royal order to withdraw.

**| In October Joan successfully took Saint-Pierre-le-Moûtier, receiving a noble status.**

After minor action at La-Charité-sur-Loire in November and December, Joan went to Compiègne the following April to defend against an English and Burgundian siege. A reckless skirmish on 23 May 1430 led to her being captured. When she ordered a retreat, she assumed the place of honor as the last to leave the field. Burgundians surrounded the rear guard, she was unhorsed by an archer and initially refused to surrender.

It was customary for a captive's family to ransom a prisoner of war. Unfortunately, Joan and her family lacked the financial resources. Many historians condemn King Charles VII for failing to intervene. She attempted several escapes, on one occasion jumping from her 70 foot (21 m) tower in Vermandois to the soft earth of a dry moat, after which she was moved to the Burgundian town of Arras. The English government eventually purchased her from Duke Philip of Burgundy. Bishop Pierre Cauchon of Beauvais, an English partisan, assumed a prominent role in these negotiations and her later trial.

The trial for heresy was politically motivated. The Duke of Bedford claimed the throne of France for his nephew Henry VI. She had been responsible for the rival coronation so to condemn her was to undermine her king's legitimacy. Legal proceedings commenced on 9 January 1431 at Rouen, the seat of the English occupation government. The procedure was irregular on a number of points.

To summarize some major problems, the jurisdiction of judge Bishop Cauchon was a legal fiction. He owed his appointment to his partisan support of the English government that financed the entire trial. Clerical notary Nicolas Bailly, commissioned to collect testimony against Joan, could find no

adverse evidence. Without such evidence the court lacked grounds to initiate a trial. Opening a trial anyway, the court also violated ecclesiastical law in denying her right to a legal advisor. Upon the opening of the first public examination Joan complained that those present were all partisans against her and asked for "ecclesiastics of the French side" to be invited.

**The trial record demonstrates her remarkable intellect.** The transcript's most famous exchange is an exercise in subtlety. "Asked if she knew she was in God's grace, she answered: 'If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me.'" The question is a scholarly trap. Church doctrine held that no one could be certain of being in God's grace. If she had answered yes, then she would have convicted herself of heresy. If she had answered no, then she would have confessed her own guilt. Notary Boisguillaume would later testify that at the moment the court heard this reply, "Those who were interrogating her were stupefied."

Several court functionaries later testified that significant portions of the transcript were altered in her disfavor. Many clerics served under compulsion, including the inquisitor, Jean LeMaitre, and a few even received death threats from the English. Under Inquisitorial guidelines, Joan should have been confined to an ecclesiastical prison under the supervision of female guards. Instead, the English kept her in a secular prison guarded by their own soldiers. Bishop Cauchon denied Joan's appeals to the Council of Basel and the pope, which should have stopped his proceeding.

The twelve articles of accusation that summarize the court's finding contradict the already doctored court record.

The illiterate defendant signed an abjuration document she did not understand under threat of immediate execution. The court substituted a different abjuration in the official record.

## **Execution**

Heresy was a capital crime only for a repeat offense. Joan agreed to wear women's clothes when she abjured. A few days later she was assaulted in prison. She resumed male attire either as a defense against molestation or, in the testimony of Jean Massieu, because her dress had been stolen and she was left with nothing else to wear.

Eyewitnesses described the scene of the execution by burning on 30 May 1431. Tied to a tall pillar in the Vieux-Marche in Rouen, she asked two of the clergy, Fr Martin Ladvenu and Fr Isambart de la Pierre, to hold a crucifix before her. A peasant also constructed a small cross which she put in the front of her dress. After she expired, the English raked back the coals to expose her charred body so that no one could claim she had escaped alive, then burned the body twice more to reduce it to ashes and prevent any collection of relics. They cast her remains into the Seine.

## **Retrial**

A posthumous retrial opened after the war ended. Pope Callixtus III authorized this proceeding, also known as the "nullification trial", at the request of Inquisitor-General Jean Brehal and Joan's mother Isabelle R=oméé. The aim of the trial was to investigate whether the trial of condemnation and its verdict had been handled justly and according to canon law. Investigations started with an inquest by clergyman Guillaume Bouille. Brehal conducted an investigation in 1452. A formal appeal followed in November, 1455. The

appellate process included clergy from throughout Europe and observed standard court procedure. A panel of theologians analyzed testimony from 115 witnesses. Brehal drew up his final summary in June, 1456, which describes Joan as a martyr and implicates the late Pierre Cauchon with heresy for having convicted an innocent woman in pursuit of a secular vendetta. The court declared her innocence on 7 July 1456.

## **Clothing**

Joan of Arc wore men's clothing between her departure from Vaucouleurs and her abjuration at Rouen. This raised theological questions in her own era and raised other questions in the twentieth century. The technical reason for her execution was a biblical clothing law. The nullification trial reversed the conviction in part because the condemnation proceeding

had failed to consider the doctrinal exceptions to that stricture. Doctrinally speaking, she was safe to disguise herself as a page during a journey through enemy territory and she was safe to wear armor during battle. The *Chronique de la Pucelle* states that it deterred molestation while she was camped in the field. Clergy who testified at her rehabilitation trial affirmed that she continued to wear male clothing in prison to deter molestation and rape. Preservation of chastity was another justifiable reason for crossdressing: her apparel would have slowed an assailant, and men would be less likely to think of her as a sex object in any case.

She referred the court to the Poitiers inquiry when questioned on the matter during her condemnation trial. The Poitiers record no longer survives but circumstances indicate the Poitiers clerics approved her practice. In other words, she had a mission to do a man's work so it was fitting that she dress the part. She also kept her hair cut short through her military campaigns and while in prison. Her supporters, such as the theologian Jean Gerson, defended her hairstyle, as did Inquisitor Brehal during the Rehabilitation trial.

## **Hundred Years War**

The Hundred Years' War continued for 22 years after her death. Charles VII succeeded in retaining legitimacy as king of France in spite of a rival coronation held for Henry VI in December 1431 on the boy's tenth birthday. Before England could rebuild its military leadership and longbow corps, lost during 1429, the country lost its alliance with Burgundy at the Treaty of Arras in 1435. The Duke of Bedford died the same year and Henry VI became the youngest king of England to rule without a regent; his weak leadership was probably the most important factor in ending the conflict. Joan of Arc became a semi-legendary figure for the next four centuries. The main sources of information about her were chronicles. Five original manuscripts of her condemnation trial surfaced in old archives during the 19th century. Soon historians also located the complete records of her rehabilitation trial, which contained sworn testimony from 115 witnesses, and the original French notes for the Latin condemnation trial transcript. Various contemporary letters also emerged, three of which carry the signature "*Jehanne*" in the unsteady hand of a person learning to write.

Joan of Arc came from an obscure village and rose to prominence when she was barely more than a child, and she did so as an uneducated peasant. The French and English kings had justified the ongoing war through competing interpretations of the thousand-year-old Salic law. The conflict had been an inheritance feud between monarchs.

## **Joan's Original Letters :**

*"King of England, and you, Duke of Bedford, who call yourself regent of the kingdom of France... settle your debt to the king of Heaven; return to the Maiden, who is envoy of the king of Heaven, the keys to all the good towns you took and violated in France."*

*Her Letter to the English, March–April 1429; Quicherat I, p. 240,*

"...the Maiden lets you know that here, in eight days, she has chased the English out of all the places they held on the river Loire by attack or other means: they are dead or prisoners or

discouraged in battle. Believe what you have heard about the earl of Suffolk, the lord la Pole and his brother, the lord Talbot, the lord Scales, and Sir Fastolf; many more knights and captains than these are defeated."

*Her Letter to the citizens of Tournai, 25 June 1429; Quicherat V, pp. 125–126.*

*"Prince of Burgundy, I pray of you — I beg and humbly supplicate — that you make no more war with the holy kingdom of France. Withdraw your people swiftly from certain places and fortresses of this holy kingdom, and on behalf of the gentle king of France I say he is ready to make peace with you, by his honor."*

*"Her Letter to Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, 17 July 1429; Quicherat V, pp. 126–127, trans. Wikipedia.*

*"It is true that the king has made a truce with the duke of Burgundy for fifteen days and that the duke is to turn over the city of Paris at the end of fifteen days. Yet you should not marvel if I do not enter that city so quickly. I am not content with these truces and do not know if I will keep them, but if I hold them it will only be to guard the king's honor: no matter how much they abuse the royal blood, I will keep and maintain the royal army in case they make no peace at the end of those fifteen days."*

*"Her Letter to the citizens of Reims, 5 August 1429; Quicherat I,*

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*Letter to the King of England*

*King of England, render account to the King of Heaven of your royal blood. Return the keys of all the good cities which you have seized, to the Maid. She is sent by God to reclaim the royal blood, and is fully prepared to make peace, if you will give her satisfaction; that is, you must render justice, and pay back all that you have taken.*

*King of England, if you do not do these things, I am the commander of the military; and in whatever place I shall find your men in France, I will make them flee the country, whether they wish to or not; and if they will not obey, the Maid will have them all killed.*

*She comes sent by the King of Heaven, body for body, to take you out of France, and the Maid promises and certifies to you that if you do not leave France she and her troops will raise a mighty outcry as has not been heard in France in a thousand years.*

*And believe that the King of Heaven has sent her so much power that you will not be able to harm her or her brave army. To you, archers, noble companions in arms, and all people who are before Orleans, I say to you in God's name, go home to your own country; if you do not do so, beware of the Maid, and of the damages you will suffer.*

*Do not attempt to remain, for you have no rights in France from God, the King of Heaven, and the Son of the Virgin Mary. It is Charles, the rightful heir, to whom God*

*has given France, who will shortly enter Paris in a grand company. If you do not believe the news written of God and the Maid, then in whatever place we may find you, we will soon see who has the better right, God or you. William de la Pole, Count of Suffolk, Sir John Talbot, and Thomas, Lord Scales, lieutenants of the Duke of Bedford, who calls himself regent of the King of France for the King of England, make a response, if you wish to make peace over the city of Orleans! If you do not do so, you will always recall the damages which will attend you.*

*Duke of Bedford, who call yourself regent of France for the King of England, the Maid asks you not to make her destroy you. If you do not render her satisfaction, she and the French will perform the greatest feat ever done in the name of Christianity. Done on the Tuesday of Holy Week (March 22, 1429)*

*+Jhesus Maria+*

*King of England, and you, duke of Bedford, who call yourself regent of the kingdom of France, you, William de la Poule, Sir John Talbot, and you, Sir Thomas of Scales who call yourself lieutenant of the aforesaid duke of Bedford, render your account to the King of Heaven. Surrender to the Maid, who is sent here from God, the King of Heaven, the keys to all the good cities that you have taken and violated in France.*

*She has come here from God to proclaim the blood royal.*

*She is entirely ready to make peace, if you are willing to settle accounts with her, provided that you give up France and pay for having occupied her. And those among you, archers, companions- at- arms, gentlemen, and others who are before the city of Orléans, go back to your countries, for God's sake. And if you do not do so, wait for the word of the Maid who will come visit you briefly, to your great damage.*

*If you do not do so, I am commander of the armies, and in whatever place I shall meet your French allies, I shall make them leave it, whether they wish to or not; and if they will not obey, I shall have them all killed.*

*I am sent from God , the King of Heaven, to chase you all out of France, body for body (every last one of you). And if they wish to obey, I shall have mercy on them. And have no other opinion, for you shall never hold the kingdom of France from God, the King of Heaven, the son of St. Mary; but Charles, the true heir, will hold it; for God, the King of Heaven, wishes it so and has revealed this through the Maid, and he will enter Paris with a goodly company.*

*If you do not wish to believe this message from God through the Maid, then whenever we find you we will strike you there, and make a great uproar greater than any made in France for a thousand years, if you do not come to terms.*

*And believe firmly that the King of Heaven will send the Maid more force than you will ever know how to achieve with all of your assaults on her and on her good men-at-arms; and in exchange of blows we shall see who has better right from the King of Heaven.*

*You, duke of Bedford, the Maid prays you and requests that you cause no more destruction. If you will settle your account, you can come to join her company, in which the French will achieve the finest feat ever accomplished in Christendom.*

*And give answer, if you wish to make peace in the city of Orléans; and is indeed you do not do so, be mindful soon of your great damages.*

*Written on Tuesday of Holy Week.*

Sent on 5th May 1429 from Orléans.

This letter survives only in the Latin trial transcript.

*You, O English, who have no right to this kingdom of France, the King of Heaven orders and commands you through me, Joan the Maid, to leave your fortresses and return to your country, and if you do not so I shall make a hayhay that will be perpetually remembered. Behold what I write you for the third and final time; I shall write to you no further.*

*Signed,*

*Jesus-Maria,*

*Joan the Maid.*

#### *POSTSCRIPT*

*I have sent you my letters honestly, but you have detained my messengers, for you kept my herald named Guyenne with you. Please send him back to me and I will send you some of your men who were taken in the fortress of Saint-Loup, for they are not all dead.*

I knew the sword was there because my Voices told me so; and I sent to ask that it be given to me to carry in the wars. It seemed to me that it was not very deep in the ground. The clergy of the church caused it to be sought for and dug up; and they polished it, and the rust fell easily off from it.

I wore it constantly until I left St. Denis after the attack upon Paris. I loved it because it was found in the church of St. Catherine, for I loved that church very dearly...

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