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JEANNE D'ARC
French, 1412-1431

Brief Bio

Joan of Arc was a peasant girl living in France during the Hundred Years' War. She believed God wished her to lead the French army to victory and expel the English. Her military successes and subsequent execution have led her to become a national figure in France and a celebrated martyr in the Catholic Church.

19 MYTHS BUSTED

JOAN OF ARC

Unravel 19 - one for every year of her life - mistruths, legends and myths about the peasant girl who led France's armies and became a worldwide icon

Written by Frances White

Joan of Arc is a name that is known worldwide. Upheld as a saint in the Catholic Church, a national hero in France and an inspiration to those facing adversity, her tale of heroism and sacrifice has transcended time and entered into legend. The story of the young rebellious teen who defeated the English army in the Hundred Years' War before being burned to death by the Inquisition for being a witch has been retold countless times. But just how accurate is this portrayal? She was indeed burned at the stake, but not for being a witch

and certainly not by the Inquisition. She also didn't win the Hundred Years' War and, while we're at it, she wasn't even all that rebellious. The image of the ferocious, cross-dressing warrior Joan we have today is the one her enemies used to damn her to execution.

It's only natural for historical figures to pick up some misconceptions and myths along the way, but in Joan's case the sheer amount of inaccuracies in the face of hard evidence is overwhelming. Ironically, it is the notaries of the trials that tried to wipe her off the planet who have provided us with the most

reliable and insightful information about the woman who lived in the 15th century. These transcripts provide a very different image of Joan, a soft-spoken, pious girl who wept for her enemies and wished more than anything to return to her quiet, farming life. This true image of a girl who was not naturally violent, but instead showed great courage in the face of immense fear and adversity, is perhaps even more inspiring than the warrior goddess she's painted to be. Read on as we strip away the myths and reveal the true heroine as she really was.

Her execution was faked

In 1436, five years after Joan was burned at the stake, a strange, unexpected figure appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. Her alleged identity caught the attention of the whole of France - she claimed she was Joan of Arc and that she had escaped her execution. There had been plenty of women claiming to be the famous Joan of Arc before, but this woman bore a striking resemblance to the young warrior and, most convincing of all, Joan's own brothers, Jean and Pierre, were with her and attested to the truth of her tale. This 'Joan' claimed she had managed to flee her captors and lived in obscurity for years. The tale caught the attention of the nation, and the three travelled around France, were bestowed with lavish gifts and even visited Joan's old comrades, who consistently identified her as the woman they believed to have lost five years prior.

It was during her visit to the French King Charles VII in 1440, the man she had helped to put on the throne in 1429, that the lie was unravelled. The king apparently asked 'Joan' to tell him the secret she had told him many years prior; the woman was unable to answer and confessed her treachery, revealing herself to be a woman named Jeanne des Armoises. The idea of the real Joan of Arc escaping her execution can be disproved by the sheer amount of eyewitnesses at her execution. The English were so worried that people would attest that she escaped that they made the executioner push the fire back so all present could see her charred corpse.

She was a feminist

The reasons for Joan's feminist status today are fairly obvious - a young girl leaving home to lead armies of men at the height of one of the biggest conflicts in Europe - but by today's standards Joan would be the opposite of a feminist. The young warrior's favourite hobbies were not disobeying authority and fighting for justice with a sword, but the far more traditionally feminine

pastimes of sewing, weaving and cleaning. Her most boastful comments were not about her ability to lead men, but her skill in besting any woman with a needle and spindle. When she was directly questioned about why she wasn't doing more "womanly duties" she simply replied that other women were already doing them. She was also known to loathe the female

camp followers, and there are even accounts of her chasing them off with a sword - hardly the actions of an ambassador for female rights. Joan's quest was first and foremost to put a man on the throne of France, and she led not women into battle, but men. Hardly rocking the foundations of gender roles, she was rather reinforcing the tradition that men, not women, should be in power.

While pretending to be Joan, Jeanne des Armoises visited the Princess Elizabeth of Luxembourg and went on several pilgrimages



Joan was hardly the miraculously gifted horse rider she's painted to be; she learned to ride as she conducted her mission, and was placed with the slowest riders in battle.

TO DO:

Chase sinful women out of camp

Return to mother and father

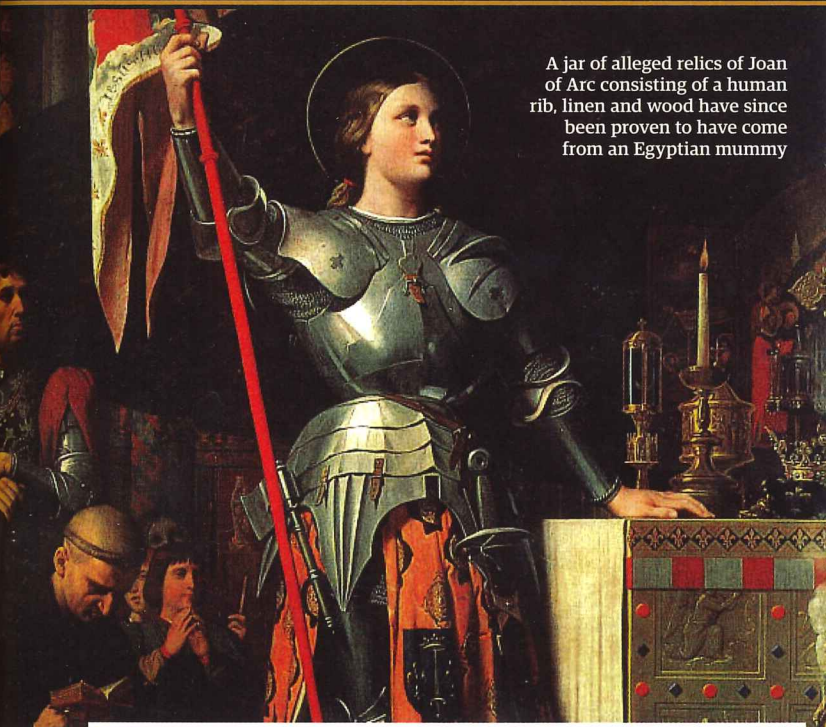
Sew a new dress

Practise weaving

Milk the cows

Dust the house

Help mother with the spinning

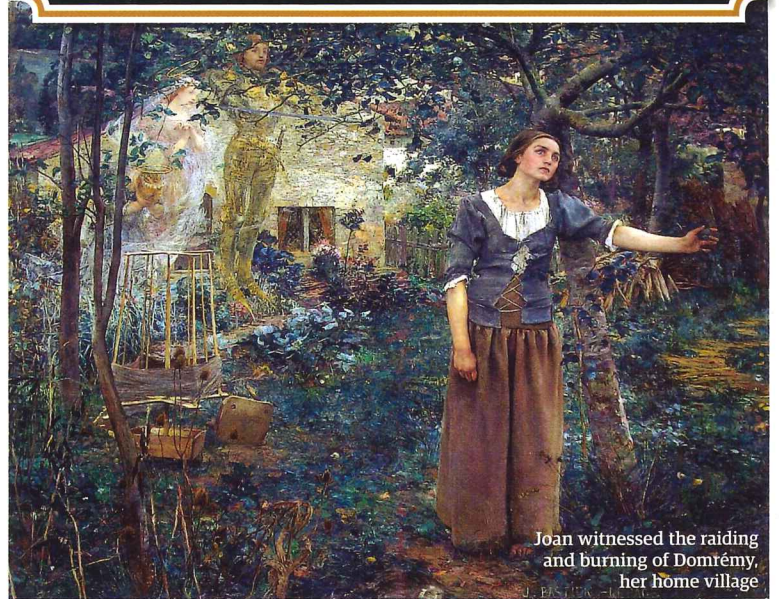


A jar of alleged relics of Joan of Arc consisting of a human rib, linen and wood have since been proven to have come from an Egyptian mummy

Joan was a rebellious child

Throughout history rebellious teen girls have frequently been compared to Joan of Arc, with the young saint being portrayed as a devil-may-care rebel who disobeyed her parents to lead armies. The French icon was quite the opposite; quiet, pious, dedicated to her family and diligent, with the most rebellious action attributed to her young years going off to visit local churches without

permission. She approached her mission with some reluctance and consistently expressed a desire to return home to her parents. The most damning evidence against her rebellious personality is the fact that the prosecution made the very same claim against her in trial, but were forced to retract the accusation upon finding absolutely no evidence to substantiate it.



Joan witnessed the raiding and burning of Domrémy, her home village.

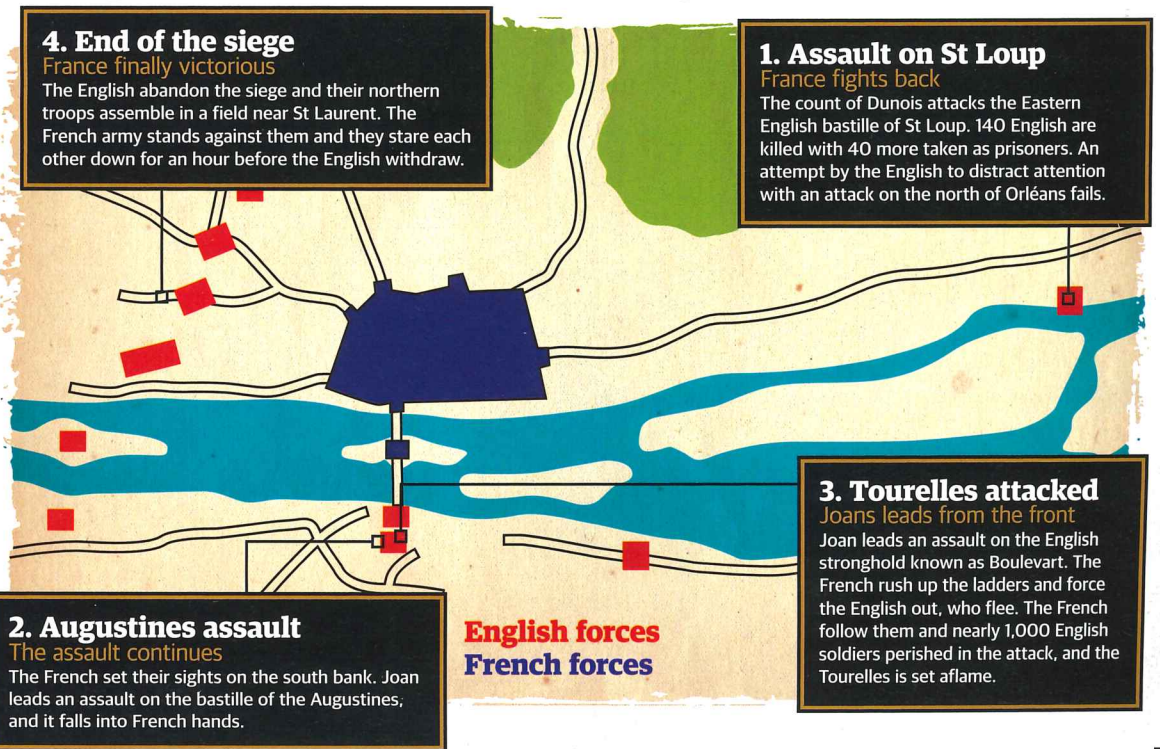
The Catholic Church wanted her dead

The notion that the Catholic Church personally hunted Joan down seems to be coupled with the idea she was either Protestant or guilty of witchcraft, which are both absurd theories. Not only is there not a shred of evidence to support her allegiance to Wicca (a pagan religion) in any way, but when Joan was asked about this at the trial her answers proved not only contempt for pagan practises, but also that she had no real idea what they actually were.

Similar can be said about the theory that she was Protestant, and she even threatened to lead a crusade against the Hussites (an early Protestant group) if they didn't convert to Catholicism. The Catholics present at the trial were led not by some epic religious quest, but by their own personal political allegiances to the English. Most of the Catholic clergy actually supported Joan and she was upheld as a 'true Catholic' before she began her campaign.

She was a great military tactician

Joan, a naïve 17-year-old peasant girl, certainly showed immense bravery riding into battle alongside seasoned warriors, but she was no military genius. In fact, Joan's rash actions and reckless decisions proved more than once to be a dangerous addition to the French army. For example, upon approaching Orléans she insisted the English should be attacked from the north as that was where their greatest numbers lay. The commanders were so against this potentially disastrous strategy that they took the convoy on a different route without telling Joan. When the attack did happen, Joan was napping and nearly missed the entire battle. When the young warrior acted of her own accord and tried to attack the stronghold of Boulevard, she narrowly escaped disaster and had to be dragged off the field amid mass panic. After this she was asked to sit out on the assault the next day, a request she ignored.



English forces
French forces

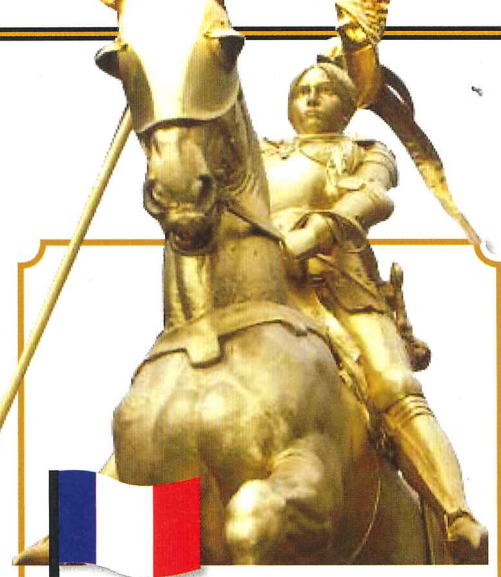


Joan was forced to wear men's clothes when she was given no female clothes to wear in prison



Men's clothing were her garments of choice

The vision of Joan of Arc swapping her dresses for trousers and armour at the first opportunity is a common one, and it was the act of wearing male clothes that she was finally executed for. But she did not wear boys' clothing from preference, but rather as a necessity - first to enable her to ride a horse with more ease and later to protect herself from the many rape attempts she faced. Not only did Joan happily wear a dress for the 17 years of her life before she embarked on her journey, but she also begged to be buried in a dress if she died in prison.



The French people were angry about her death

Today Joan is upheld as a national hero and martyr, but at the time many of the citizens of France were more likely to celebrate her death than mourn it. For the English, the death of the mascot of the French forces was an important boon, and they openly rejoiced at the news of her execution. Those who supported Joan and Charles VII would have taken the news with sadness, but there was no mass mourning, and the royal court didn't recognise her death. It took years for France to revoke the trial sentence and embrace Joan as the figure she is today. After her innocence was declared, she gradually became a legendary figure for the four centuries after her death, and was used as a political symbol by Napoleon in the early-19th century. To date, there have been over 20 statues created in her honour, countless paintings, operas, films and even French Navy ships named after her.



The French victory in the Hundred Years' War was thanks to Joan

Although there is no denying Joan's presence helped lift the siege of Orléans, leading to the crowning of Charles VII, it would be incorrect to attest the ultimate French victory to her. Not only was Joan executed 20 years before the final battle at Castillon, but several other important factors led to the eventual French victory. The period of the war was a transition period for France, as the country developed from a medieval feudal system to a modern state with a professional army. The long periods

between individual conflicts of the war allowed the French army to gather its strength and become a fierce, organised force. The English army were faced with severe funding issues and became distracted with conflict back at home that led to the War of the Roses, so the French campaign became unfeasible. While Joan certainly inspired nationalism among a dejected army, the intricacies of the war are far too varied and complex to place the victory solely on one brave woman with a banner.

The war at a glance

1346

Battle of Crécy

Edward III's English troops decimate the French forces by utilising new weapons and military tactics. This victory allows the English army to besiege and claim the town of Calais as English territory.
26 August 1346

Battle of Poitiers

The English forces raiding their way through the French countryside, finally meet resistance in King John II of France, but the battle sees the English destroy the French forces and capture the French king.
19 September 1356

Treaty of Brétigny

King John II and King Edward III's treaty hands over much French land to England, under the duress that Edward renounces all claims to the French throne.
25 May 1360

Battle of Agincourt

After English king Henry V claims the French throne, he leads his forces to northern France. Despite being outnumbered, the English forces defeat and cripple the French army, leading to a new period of war.
25 October 1415

Treaty of Troyes

It is agreed that Henry will inherit the throne of France upon the death of Charles VI. This agreement goes on to prompt the later stages of the war, with many English kings claiming the throne.
21 May 1420

Siege of Orléans

French and English forces battle over possession of Orléans, which holds great strategic advantage. The tide turns when Joan of Arc enters the city. Nine days after her arrival, the siege collapses and France claim their first major victory for many years.
12 Oct 1428 - 8 May 1429


Battle of Castillon

English forces capture Bordeaux. In response, King Charles VII attacks the English forces and defeats them. The battle results in the loss of all English land in France except for the Pale of Calais.
17 July 1453



The Duke of Bedford was an evil man

The third son of King Henry IV, John Lancaster served as regent of France for King Henry VI, his nephew. Because his actions led to the capture and eventual execution of Joan of Arc, history has placed a black blot against his name, and an unfair one. Not only was John a skilled military tactician, but he also displayed great bravery in battle and acted as a thoughtful and merciful governor among reckless leaders. Considering the era of his life, Bedford was restrained and sympathetic, with unrelenting loyalty to his cause and family.


The allegations that Joan sold her body to men were disproved when she was examined during her capture and proved to be a virgin.

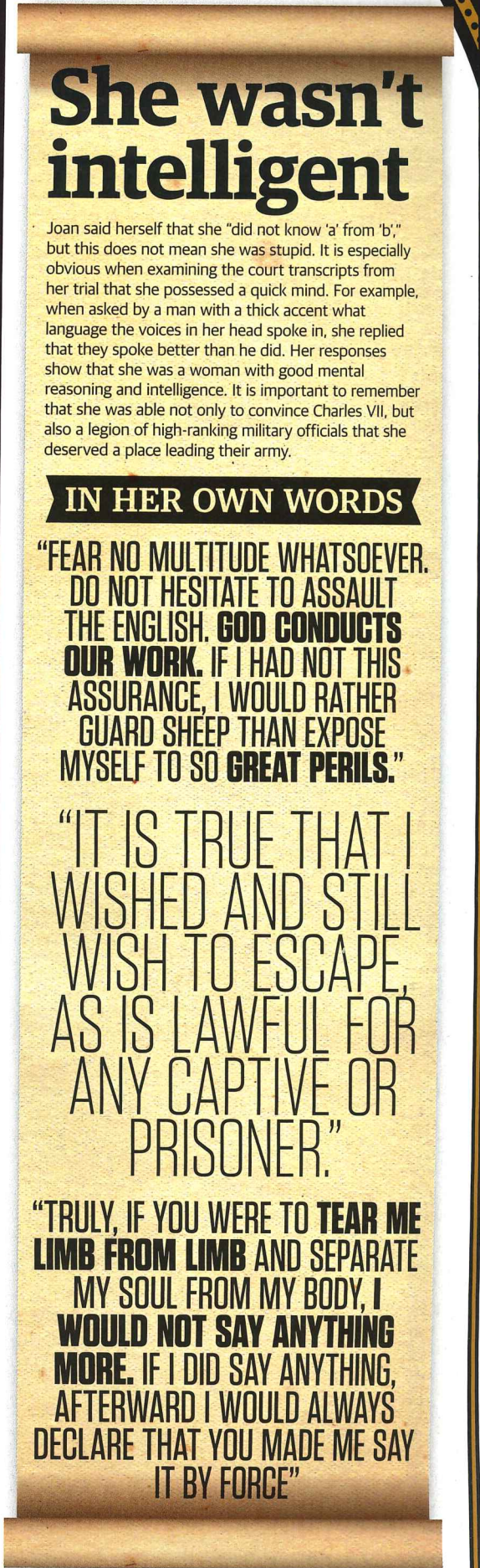
John led the English army to several victories, for example at the Battle of Verneuil, described as a second Agincourt

It was unusual for women to lead armies

The only unusual thing about Joan's command of an army is not her gender, but her social standing. It was common during the era for aristocratic women to command their family's forces in the absence of a brother or husband. And rather than going against the grain and breaking social norms, this was actually adhering to the feudal society in France at the time. Joan was granted command because of the religious society that believed anyone could receive a divine calling, and it should be listened to. It is highly unlikely that a legion of male soldiers would have followed her word if the inclusion of women in battle had not already been widely accepted at the time.



Joanna of Flanders
Joanna of Flanders was married to John de Montfort and served as consort duchess of Brittany from 1341 to 1345. She played an active part in the War of Breton Succession, where she led the Montfortist armies after her husband was captured. Joanna managed to capture the commune of Redon and at the siege of Hennebont she encouraged the women to "cut their skirts and take their safety in their own hands." Joanna was described as entering the fray with her sword and fighting "with the heart of a lion."



She wasn't intelligent

Joan said herself that she "did not know 'a' from 'b,'" but this does not mean she was stupid. It is especially obvious when examining the court transcripts from her trial that she possessed a quick mind. For example, when asked by a man with a thick accent what language the voices in her head spoke in, she replied that they spoke better than he did. Her responses show that she was a woman with good mental reasoning and intelligence. It is important to remember that she was able not only to convince Charles VII, but also a legion of high-ranking military officials that she deserved a place leading their army.

IN HER OWN WORDS

"FEAR NO MULTITUDE WHATSOEVER. DO NOT HESITATE TO ASSAULT THE ENGLISH. **GOD CONDUCTS OUR WORK.** IF I HAD NOT THIS ASSURANCE, I WOULD RATHER GUARD SHEEP THAN EXPOSE MYSELF TO SO **GREAT PERILS.**"

"IT IS TRUE THAT I WISHED AND STILL WISH TO ESCAPE, AS IS LAWFUL FOR ANY CAPTIVE OR PRISONER."

"TRULY, IF YOU WERE TO **TEAR ME LIMB FROM LIMB** AND SEPARATE MY SOUL FROM MY BODY, I **WOULD NOT SAY ANYTHING MORE.** IF I DID SAY ANYTHING, AFTERWARD I WOULD ALWAYS **DECLARE THAT YOU MADE ME SAY IT BY FORCE**"



Her canonisation swiftly followed her death

The belief that Joan was immediately hailed as a saint straight after her burning at the stake is incorrect. In fact it took 25 years for a second trial to even take place. The retrial took place in 1456 following an investigation in 1452 and a formal appeal in 1455. Overseen by Pope Callixtus III at the request of Joan's mother and Inquisitor-General Jean Bréhal, the trial examined testimony from 115 witnesses and concluded that Joan was innocent of her crimes. Originally 70 charges were brought against Joan, but these were reduced to 12, which varied from witchcraft to horse theft. The two that she was eventually found guilty of were heresy and cross-dressing. Although Joan became a strong figure in the Catholic Church, she wasn't actually canonised until 16 May 1920 by Pope Benedict XV, almost 500 years after her death.



Charles of Orléans was her father

This myth is one of the oldest ones concerning Joan, borne out of the ancient belief that someone from such low social standing could not possibly accomplish such remarkable things. In 1407 a baby was born to the Orléans family who died soon after birth, so people jumped on the idea that Joan must have been this 'lost' child, secretly bundled away and coached to later emerge and lead France to victory. This absurd theory ignores the fact that this child indeed did die as the records say and was born five years before Joan. There is not a shred of evidence to back up this conspiracy theory, and it is quite absurd that the idea of Joan having royal blood somehow legitimises her achievements, as during this period several members of the French royal family were suffering from mental disabilities and insanity themselves.

She was a great warrior

Although 'The Maid of Orléans' is remembered as a fearless warrior, she admitted at her trial that she never killed anyone. In fact, Joan was probably one of the mildest figures on the field, and her comrades attested to the fact that she wept and prayed for the departed souls on both sides of the battle. Joan took less of a combat role and acted as a sort of 'mascot' for the troops. Although she carried a sword, it was her banner she relied on, proclaiming, "I liked much better, even forty times, my standard than my sword." The image of Joan tearing across the battlefield slaughtering the English is not true, but she was very brave - at the Siege of Orléans she was shot with an arrow between her neck and shoulder but stayed on the battlefield to encourage the French troops.





She lied about the voices in her head

The appearance of three mysterious voices in Joan's head sent the French teenager off in her quest to expel the English from her homeland. The accusation that Joan was lying about these holy voices was as common at the time as it is today. At her trial Joan was asked frequently about the voices, about what they told her to do and the nature of their appearances. Considering Joan was representing herself and was subjected to daily physical and mental exhaustion, it would not have been surprising if her tale deviated - but it did not. Under constant questioning Joan's account of her miraculous visions remained constant. Joan experienced her first vision when she was 12 years old; the voices told her to drive the English out of the country and bring the dauphin Charles to Reims to be crowned. It wasn't until she was 16 that she felt compelled to follow them.

It seems unlikely she made the three saintly voices up for attention, as the story would likely unravel under the interrogation of skilled lawyers. Whether the voices really did come from saints and angels as Joan claimed is impossible to validate, but what we can say with some certainty is that Joan believed the voices she heard were legitimate, and she followed them despite putting herself in danger.

Judge
The Bishop of Beauvais, Pierre Cauchon, served as the judge at Joan's trial and was the primary catalyst behind her sentencing and execution. An English sympathiser, he used intimidation, fraud and threats to bring Joan to her eventual downfall.

Inquisitor
The presence of a member of the Inquisition was required by law to validate the trial, but Vice Inquisitor Jean Le Maistre was mostly absent. It was later reported that Le Maistre refused to cooperate until his life was threatened by the English, and he subsequently played a very small part in the trial.

Prosecutor
Jean Beaupere served as a prosecutor during Joan's trial. He interrogated her mercilessly and insisted there were natural causes for Joan's visions. He later testified about the trial in 1452 during the investigations for the retrial.

The Inquisition arranged her trial
The assumption that the Inquisition hunted down Joan and pushed for her trial is a common one, but inaccurate. Pierre Cauchon was the main judge at the trial, but he was not a member of the Inquisition, and in fact there was only one inquisitor there - Jean Le Maistre. Maistre did not attend the trial, but was forced to preside by the English who threatened him with death if he dared to refuse. At the retrial years after Joan's death, Inquisitor Jean Bréhal agreed with Maistre that the trial and conviction was wholly illegal. Those who did speak out about the illegality and unfair proceedings during the trial were either thrown in prison themselves or threatened with death by the English, with the inquisitors not exempt from these threats. Joan's trial and eventually execution was wholly political, and the entire proceedings were controlled by the English who wished to rid France of this dangerous woman who threatened their victory.

There is no evidence at all that Joan was homosexual and this 'crime' did not feature on the long list of accusations she faced at trial.

VOICES IN HER HEAD

SAINT MICHAEL
ARCHANGEL IN CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM AND JUDAISM
Known for: Leading God's armies and defeating Satan in the Book of Revelation

SAINT CATHERINE
EGYPTIAN, 282-305
Known for: Converting hundreds of people to Christianity aged 14, executed by Emperor Maxentius.

SAINT MARGARET
GREEK, UNKNOWN-304
Known for: Being disowned and tortured due to her Christian beliefs and prompting many miraculous incidents to occur. Was killed aged 15.

