

JOAN OF ARC

AND WHY THE FRENCH WILL NEVER FORGIVE THE BRITS



It's still erroneously believed that Joan of Arc was tried and convicted by the Inquisition with the blessing of the Catholic Church, even though the main judge, Pierre Cauchon, was not a member of the Inquisition, and the only representative of the Inquisition to preside at the trial (Vice Inquisitor Jean LeMaistre) was induced to attend after being threatened by the English. LeMaistre seems to have felt that the trial was illegal from the beginning, a position with which his fellow Inquisitor Jean Brehal agreed when the case was appealed and came up for a retrial about 20 years after her death (from 1450-1456), leading the Church to overturn the original conviction.

BY MARGARET HUFFSTICKLER

The French have never quite forgiven the Anglo-Saxons, deep down, for defeating Napoleon, who in their eyes was creating a United Europe, with Paris, the “City of Lights,” as its capital. Nor have they forgiven the British for, according to hair samples, slowly and secretly killing Napoleon, their prisoner on St. Helena, with arsenic.

But by far the sorest sore point between the francosphere and the anglosphere was burning Joan of Arc alive at the stake in 1431 on absurd charges of heresy. The English, who at the time occupied much of France, alleged that no woman but a witch would wear men’s armor. In truth, they simply wanted this young woman dead because she was a threat to their control of French territory.

The charismatic, fervent 19-year-old girl (b. 1412), told by Saint Margaret of Antioch, Saint Catherine of Alexandria and the Archangel Michael, in visions, to give courage to the French king and save France, had entirely changed the atmosphere of the Hundred Years War, both on the battlefield and in all the vil-lages of France.

She may have been a very skilled tactician, according to testimony by officers at a second trial 20 years after her death, and she was definitely a castle stormer. She was also a literal standard bearer, charging with the battle flag into the enemy’s ranks. She once pulled an English arrow from her shoulder and continued fighting, which electrified her army. Later she was grazed on the helmet by an English stone cannonball. She took a France on the ropes, with a weak king, and turned the military tide in favor of France.

There is likely a France today because of Joan of Arc. Eng-



Above, a depiction of Charles VII from an old engraving.



Left, Joan of Arc at the coronation of Charles VII in Rheims Cathedral, painted by the famous French artist Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1854. Presently housed in the Louvre, Paris. It's commonly believed that Joan of Arc "violated the norms" of her society by being given titular command of an army and wearing "male" armor, even though there were actually a number of women who led armies and/or wore armor during that era, including Countess Jeanne de Penthèvre, Marcia Ordelaifi, Jeanne de Belleville, Lady de Chatillon, Countess Jeanne de Montfort and Matilde of Tuscany. Such women were fulfilling their societal roles under the laws of feudalism, not "breaking the rules."

land took 800 years to let Ireland go, once conquered, and still controls Wales and Scotland. England is tenacious and fierce, once it becomes an enemy. (Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, asked once if England was still an important power in our time, said: "England is an old lion that still has claws.")

Many great talents have depicted the Maid of Orleans—Shakespeare, Voltaire, Schiller, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Mark Twain and Brecht—and two recent Hollywood movies (among many) have done her some justice. The finest, most balanced and accurate portrait of her, without propaganda, was by the great English dramatist and Nobel Prize winner, George Bernard Shaw, in his play *St. Joan*.

Shaw considered her a religious proto-Protestant because she insisted in 1430, many decades before Martin Luther, that her personal visions of God's will gave her the right to take up arms, whatever the Catholic hierarchy thought about them or her. (She was not made a Catholic saint until 1920.) This fundamental and revolutionary attitude seemed like anarchy, megalomania and cultism to French Bishop Cauchon, a sincere man who, as the detailed witchcraft trial transcripts from 1431 show, only very reluctantly acquiesced in what the English were going to do anyway, whatever the witchcraft verdict: kill her, just as they

killed the charismatic William "Braveheart" Wallace of Scotland.

In fact, in her trial, Cauchon gave her numerous opportunities to say that the Church should decide about the visions of illiterate farm girls, urging her just to say the right words of acknowledgment. (After Cauchon died and the English had quit France, an angry mob nevertheless dug up his bones and threw them into the Seine.) In retrospect, the Church feared, rightly, that a series of charismatic Joans or Jeans or Jans or Martins would eventually break up Christendom into a hundred feuding sects and religious wars—just as the English feared she would continue to galvanize the war spirit of occupied France and thwart their century-old investment in seizing it. In Shaw's play, Cauchon reasons: "An illiterate camel trader [his term for Islam's founder, Mohammed] creates his own religion and sweeps away half of Christendom. We cannot say, 'she is just one girl'."

Truly, Joan was a human phenomenon, still fascinating 565 years after her girlish frame sank into ashes. Above all, she remains a specific symbol, in the French conscious and subconscious, of French resistance to English-speaking occupiers.

She lives on today in the image of José Bové, a handsome, mustachioed French farmer, now 53, who in 1999 became, and still remains, a household name in France. He and his Farmers

Confederation peacefully, and after a very public announcement, arrived with tractors and demolished an embryonic French McDonalds in the Aveyron. Bové became suddenly the world enemy of “la malbouffe”—the evil beef. A fluent speaker of American English, whose parents were researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, Bové granted many interviews, and served 44 days for his popular crime before being pardoned by President Jacques Chirac.

By amazing coincidence, McDonalds began to offer delicious salads that were not 75% iceberg lettuce, and substantial and well-selected vegetable cups, and to reduce previously heart-clogging levels of *la mayonnaise*.

Bové has also championed environmentalism and hence the fight against multinational corporations. In 2002, he was arrested and deported by Israeli police after meeting with Yassir Arafat—then a virtual prisoner in his own Ramallah headquarters—and after protesting Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Dozens of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrators scuffled at Orly Airport in Paris on his return. Now braving even more intense pressure, he gave an interview to the hip, powerful television channel Canal Plus, asserting that the wave of attacks against French synagogues then underway was being arranged or fabricated by the Israeli Mossad.

“Who profits from the crime?” Bove demanded. “The Israeli government and its secret services have an interest in creating a kind of psychosis. By pretending there is a climate of anti-semitism in France, they are distracting attention from their own actions.”

Interestingly, while Bové is the latest hero, the official national symbol of France is an allegorical young woman bearing a standard in battle, one breast bared in her onrush at the foe. This ideal girl—beautiful and militant—has been named “Marianne.” Throughout France, we find her effigy in prominent government places. Her gleaming white plaster bust is in the lobby of many a French city and town hall. On French stamps, beauties such as Brigitte Bardot and Catherine Deneuve have lent their face to become the latest incarnation of Marianne. The lovely warriorress also appears with windswept hair on French government websites.

The trial and burning of Joan, a girl defending and rallying her nation, and not recanting as she faced the blazing bonfire, has put a stamp on the French view of themselves—and of Anglo-Saxon governments as hypocritical bullies.

The other national symbol of France, masculine, is the rooster, Chanticleer. One Frenchman told why the rooster is an apropos: “The rooster is scrappy; he loves females and even if standing in manure, he continues to sing.” ♦

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It has become trendy in recent decades to portray Joan of Arc as some kind of mentally mixed up woman who really wanted to be a man. Her own statements (as found in the record of the first trial and as quoted by at least three witnesses who testified at the re-trial) clearly indicate that she wore male attire as a desperate measure to protect herself against the many rape attempts that she endured in prison (and which she was always in danger of facing while in enemy territory), not as a fashion preference. She wore a dress whenever there was no such danger (during the entire previous 17 years of her life prior to embarking on her campaigns), and she told her judges that she would wear a dress while incarcerated if they transferred her to a Church prison. In that case she would be guarded by nuns rather than abusive male guards. Additionally, she begged the court to allow her to be buried in a “long woman’s shift” if death should occur while in prison, since she was afraid that she might end up being buried in her boyish outfit. This evidently was not a terribly pleasant thought for her.