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Character and importance of St. Joan of Arc

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Also known as: *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, *Sainte Jeanne d'Arc*, *The Maid of Orléans*

Written by [Yvonne Lanhers](#), [Malcolm G.A. Vale](#) • [All](#)

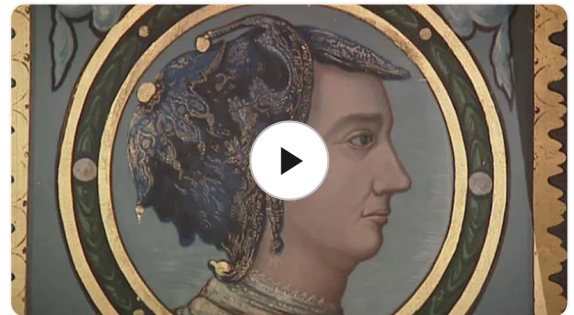
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Joan of Arc's place in history is assured. Perhaps her contribution to the history of human courage is greater than her significance in the political and [military](#) history of [France](#). She was victimized as much by a French civil conflict as by a war with a foreign power. The relief of [Orléans](#) was undoubtedly a notable victory, which secured the loyalty of certain regions of northern France to the régime of [Charles VII](#). But the [Hundred Years' War](#) continued for a further 22 years after her death, and it was the defection of [Philip the Good](#) of Burgundy from his alliance with the [Lancastrians](#) in 1435 that provided the foundation upon which the recovery of Valois France was to be based. The nature of Joan's mission, moreover, is a source of controversy among historians, theologians, and psychologists. Innumerable points about her campaigns and about the motives and actions of her supporters and enemies are subject to



Joan of Arc's true face Researchers attempting to create an accurate image of Joan of Arc's appearance.

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dispute: for instance, the number and dates of her visits to Vaucouleurs, [Chinon](#), and Poitiers; how she was able to win the confidence of the [dauphin](#) at their first meeting at Chinon; whether Charles's perambulations after his coronation at [Reims](#) represented triumphant progress or scandalous indecision; what her judges meant by "perpetual imprisonment"; whether, after her recantation, Joan resumed men's clothes of her own [free will](#) and at the bidding of her voices or, as one later story has it, because they were forced upon her by her English jailers.

Later generations have tended to distort the significance of Joan's mission according to their own political and religious viewpoints rather than seeking to set it in the troubled [context](#) of her time. The effects of the [Western Schism](#) (1378–1417) and the decline of papal authority during the [Conciliar Movement](#) (1409–49) made it difficult for persons to seek independent arbitration and judgment in cases relating to the faith. The verdicts of the [Inquisition](#) were liable to be coloured by political and other influences; and Joan was not the only victim of an essentially unjust procedure, which allowed the accused no [counsel](#) for the defense and which sanctioned interrogation under duress. Her place among the [saints](#) is secured, not perhaps by the somewhat dubious [miracles](#) attributed to her, but by the heroic [fortitude](#) with which she endured the ordeal of her trial and, except for one lapse toward its end, by her profound [conviction](#) of the [justice](#) of her cause, sustained by faith in the divine origin of her voices. In many ways a victim of internal strife within France, condemned by judges and assessors who were almost entirely northern French in origin, she has become a symbol of national [consciousness](#) with whom all French people, of whatever creed or party, can identify.

Yvonne Lanhers

Malcolm G.A. Vale

Pierre Cauchon

French bishop



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Pierre Cauchon (born 1371, near [Reims](#), Fr.—died Dec. 18, 1442, Rouen) was a French bishop of [Beauvais](#), an ecclesiastic memorable chiefly because he presided over the [trial](#) of [Joan of Arc](#).

Cauchon was educated at the [University of Paris](#), of which he became rector in 1403. He became associated with the Burgundian party and took part in the riots of the Cabochiens (radical reformers) during

1413. He was subsequently banished from Paris in 1414, taking service with [John the Fearless](#), Duke of Burgundy, thereafter. He became bishop of Beauvais in 1420. In 1422 Cauchon, as a [counselor](#) of [Henry VI](#) of England, became a servant of the king's regent in [France](#), John Plantagenet, Duke of Bedford. Cauchon aided the Anglo-Burgundian alliance in gaining control of much of northern France from the French king. An excellent opportunity to serve the English arose when Joan of Arc was captured in Cauchon's [diocese](#) in 1430. Cauchon was careful to disguise the political motivations of Joan's trial by conducting it according to [inquisitorial procedure](#) and by attempting to obtain from Joan a confession that would save her life. He is held formally responsible for her [condemnation](#) and subsequent



Pierre Cauchon

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Born: 1371, near Reims, Fr.

Died: Dec. 18, 1442, [Rouen](#) (aged 71)

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execution as a heretic. Cauchon became bishop of [Lisieux](#) in 1432.

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