

# Joan of Arc

## The Mystic Legacy



Marcia Quinn Noren

# **Joan of Arc: The Mystic Legacy**

**Marcia Quinn Noren**

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1111 Plaza Drive, Suite 652

Schaumburg, IL 60173

Enquiries:

[info@ebooks2go.net](mailto:info@ebooks2go.net)

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# Part One

## The Inclusive Nature of Mysticism

*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,  
the evidence of things not seen.*

*(New Testament, Hebrews XI, 1.)*



# I

## The Mystic Identity of Joan of Arc

**I**n the first days of 1429, a girl known in the village of her ancestors as *Jehanette* left her family's hearth in the depth of winter, and claimed her destiny at the center of a savage war that had raged within France for nearly one hundred years. Her first objective was to secure an interview with Sir Robert de Boudricourt, whose castle towered over the city of Vaucouleurs, a day's journey to the north. Standing inside his governor's quarters wrapped in a faded red cloak, she publicly disclosed her mystic identity and purpose for the first time, saying that she had been sent by God's messengers to receive de Boudricourt's immediate assistance.

From that day forward, she referred to herself by one name only; *Jehanne, La Pucelle* (*Joan, The Maid*). Spoken in three equally emphasized syllables; *Peau-cel-le* approximates the Late Medieval pronunciation of a French word that does not translate into a noun, but into the adjectives *blanche* (white), *pure*, *chaste*, *innocent*, *virginal* and *intact*. The name *La Pucelle* implies, "there is but one." *The Maid* of legend, *The Maid* of Lorraine, *The Maid* of Orleans, *The Maid* of France, *The Maid* who died as a martyr against her will at nineteen, never to become a woman.

Unlike monastic nuns who commit to celibacy for life, *La Pucelle* made a vow in solitude, to keep her virginity for as long as it pleased God. She did not receive her visions from within the safety of convent walls, nor was she authorized by the Roman Catholic Church to speak as a prophet. In the early fifteenth century, she stepped suddenly and autonomously onto the most unlikely of public stages; a time in Western Europe when anyone claiming to interact with divine influences was certain to be suspected of engaging with satanic ones, instead.

Throughout each stage of her public career, Joan was relentlessly tested; for sanity, for spiritual conviction, and for purity of intention. Most imperative to her survival in that society was irrefutable evidence of her chastity. Selected women (wives of men in power) performed intermittent pelvic examinations in order to secure that evidence.

At the time of Joan's birth in 1412, two conjoined institutions, the French monarchy and the Roman Catholic Church, ruled over the war-torn regions of France with absolute authority. Laws that defined and condemned heresy and witchcraft were enforced for hundreds of years before and after her lifetime, through the judicial process known as the *Inquisition*. Medieval historian Dr. Jeffrey Burton Russell summarizes:

*The Inquisition was founded in the 1230's and from the beginning of the fourteenth century, took a hand by enforcing scholastic definitions upon the accused by the use of torture. Antinomian heresy contributed to the formation of witchcraft in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and from 1300 onward the increasing economic, political and social crisis of medieval*

*society created conditions in which various expressions of revolt occurred, witchcraft being among the most prominent. Finally, from the 1420's to 1487, the scholastic and Inquisitorial theorists of witchcraft fixed, by persuasion and force, the classical picture of the witch in the form it was to continue to have into the eighteenth century.*<sup>1</sup>

Joan's gift of prophecy brought an immediate threat of suspicion leveled against those who have knowledge of the future, and of worlds unknown to others. It became incumbent upon her to manifest immediate results, or her life would have ended more quickly. The policy of the Church, set in the twelfth century, determined that the Bible's Old Testament prophecies (Scripture) had been fulfilled. Thereby, since the books of the New Testament were edited and closed, "No private revelation will add anything essential to the faith."<sup>2</sup>



Despite that proclamation, Christian mystics have continued to describe their ineffable, transcendent experiences. Similarly, Eastern mystics in Buddhist and Hindu traditions meditate in prayerful receptivity, and speak of awakening to the condition of divine union known as *Nirvana*, or *Samadhi*. For mystics, practicing spiritual discipline brings conscious intimacy with *The Divine*. This state of being, or condition is sought by the mystic as the reward (in-and-of itself), rather than as means toward some other end.

The path of devotion is chosen or comes as a *calling*; not as a means of escape from

ordinary reality, nor from systems of logic that are integral to life; but rather, as a portal through which one can move toward a personal knowledge of God.

From disparate eras and cultures, autobiographical reports of extrasensory engagement with the divine realm have recorded emotional responses ranging from ecstatic rapture to immobilizing terror. Descriptions of these intensely personal events, most often expressed through the visual arts and in literature, rely upon the poetic language and symbolic imagery common to mystics and shamans.

Regardless of differences in doctrine, the world's religions are founded upon belief in prophecy and mystic revelation. Although the unifying messages, "Love one another" and "Do no harm" flow from the sacred teachings of Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Taoism and lie within the tenets of Neo-Platonism, religious wars have been waged without ceasing, between orthodox fundamentalists who are taught that their chosen faith, separate from all others, is the only true path to God.

Holy texts, held sacred by followers of the religions based upon them, contain mystic sagas much like Joan's that mirror the drama of life, offer the hope of spiritual transcendence and provide evidence of divine intervention in human affairs. Printed in a multitude of languages, filled with poetry and parable, these collective teachings certainly vary, yet all promote the cultivation of similar virtues.

The primary evidence relied upon by biographers and novelists who study the extraordinary life and death of Joan of Arc is not contained in a holy text, but in the recorded transcripts from two Late Medieval trials. Without embellishment, these manuscripts are riveting; but what compels the story's retelling comes to rest fully in the human heart. Separating myth from reality is the task given to each individual who is drawn to study Joan's story and its complexities.

Although the events of her life were first chronicled during her military career, close analysis of the trial records began relatively recently. In the mid-nineteenth century, historian Jules Quicherat translated these transcripts, originally written in ancient French and Latin, and published them in a five-volume work.<sup>3</sup> Only then, approximately four hundred years after her death, did Joan's life begin to draw international attention, with literally thousands of biographies and works of fiction pouring off the presses at the turn of the twentieth century.

Biographers tend to focus on events that took place during her public career, when she was between the ages of seventeen and nineteen. This approach diminishes the importance of her formative years. In looking more closely at the dynamics that shaped Joan's life as she grew up in the rural village of Domremy, it becomes possible to understand her stated intentions and actions as a military leader more clearly.

During the *Trial of Condemnation* that convicted her of heresy and witchcraft, Joan (at age nineteen) spoke as the sole witness in her own defense, without advocate or counsel, under the most extreme pressure imaginable. Her testimony provides answers to questions that almost anyone would want to ask her, if given the opportunity.

During her incarceration, she was allowed no solitude or rest. Shackled to her prison cot when not standing before inquisitors in chains, she was held under constant watch by

enemy guards who remained inside her cell, taunting her with insults and physical threats.

Facing the court each day having slept and ate little, rarely was Joan baited into mental confusion by questions that were framed with that specific intention. Although her words offer clarity, they have been among the most historically misunderstood. She has been called *audacious* by critics from every generation, for her testimony openly challenges the ecclesiastic body's fundamental right to judge her. Convicted on May 30, 1431, Joan's life was taken later that same day in the only manner that terrified her, by fire.

Joan's mother, Isabelle Romee, initiated *The Trial of Nullification* in Paris, twenty-three years after her daughter's death. These proceedings ultimately negated the outcome of the *Trial of Condemnation*. During this second trial, over one hundred depositions were taken from surviving witnesses to the events of Joan's life, containing personal accounts by those who had observed her demeanor, behavior and actions at close range.

Testimonies of childhood friends, comrades of arms, priests, peasants and aristocrats show remarkable continuity in what they report, and a common struggle for words is apparent, as witnesses describe what had often been unfathomable. On July 7, 1456, the *Trial of Nullification* concluded, and Joan's name was formally cleared of all charges in Rouen, the city that witnessed her death at the stake.

The texts from both trials in their entirety can be accessed online. Used as a platform for study, widely varying conclusions have been drawn about their contents. Biographies, historic novels and essays resonate with the tone of each author's era, culture, prejudices, resources, school of thought, psychological profile, religious background (or lack thereof), and so on. Capable of independent thought, people simply do not draw the same conclusions from what they read, or even from witnessing the same incident. When stories are retold, the storyteller's frame of reference must always be considered.

Historians and the Roman Catholic Church have legitimized Joan in the dual roles of *military leader* and *saint*. Given the stature of these secular and spiritual achievements, why has she been the recipient of ongoing disrespect? If her testimony cannot be given credence, then it must be concluded that either she was a liar who perjured herself, or that she was delusional, and incapable of differentiating truth from fantasy. Using contemporary psychiatric diagnostic criteria, the trial transcripts provide clear evidence that Joan did not show symptoms of schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder, hysteria, hubris or narcissism. On the contrary, witnesses to her behavior (and there were many) describe a calm, clear thinking, integrated personality who more often than otherwise, expressed humility, yet acted with precision. Her straightforward manner was at times, intemperate. Although she did not suffer fools gladly, if she lied to anyone, the evidence has not been found.

Two literary giants, Mark Twain (1835-1910) and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) launched independent studies of the trial records, and each of them devoted years to perfecting major works that interpret her story. Twain's 1896 novel, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* and Shaw's Nobel Prize winning play, *Saint Joan* (1924), continue to be among the most popular books ever written about her, in the English language.

In 1966, the late, universally respected French historian, Regine Pernoud (1909-1998)

published *Joan of Arc: By Herself and Her Witnesses*, an English translation of the biography first released in France in 1962. Pernoud's contribution greatly clarified the context of Joan's life within the broader framework of Late Medieval France.

In the case of Joan of Arc, debate still rages in books, on celluloid, online and in classrooms; over the state of her sanity, the origins of her spirituality, her reasons for cross-dressing, and the level of authority she exercised within the French military campaign that ultimately altered the course of the Hundred Years War. Undeniably, in her socio-political legacy, an ongoing source of friction between interpreters of her story is the influence held by the Roman Catholic Church, as it relates to her life, death and reclamation.

Dressed in white armor, carrying symbols of heraldry consistent with knighthood, *La Pucelle* personifies the image most central to the late Joseph Campbell's discussions of the classic *Hero's Journey* and *Grail Quest*. In *The Power of Myth*, Campbell describes *the Grail* as "...symbolic of an authentic life that is lived in terms of its own volition, in terms of its own impulse system, that carries itself between the pairs of opposites of good and evil, light and dark."<sup>4</sup> He saw the Grail as an infinite source of attraction for those who seek "the fulfillment of the highest spiritual potentialities of the human consciousness."<sup>5</sup>

The unsparing degree of human suffering in France during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453) was biblical, in proportion. Overwhelming threats to human life had drained hope from a populace numb with fear, crippled by powerlessness and divided by split loyalties. Charles VI of France, father of the dauphin, died in 1422; twenty years after he was officially declared mad, seven years after the brutal defeat of the French army at Agincourt, and seven years before Joan's first public appearance.

With the court itself in an advanced state of dissipation, denial and bankruptcy, the army had been left to languish without direction or provisions. Peasant villages were defenseless against savage, ongoing raids by bands of transient mercenaries and enemy soldiers.

The English victory at Agincourt, led by Henry V landed what seemed a certain death blow to France's royal *House of Valois*. In 1420, the *Treaty of Troyes* was signed by the incapacitated Charles VI and his manipulative wife of ill repute, Isabeau of Bavaria. This document openly denied the legitimacy of Charles the dauphin, heir to the throne, and provided ripe potential for a permanent takeover of the French crown by the English monarchy.<sup>6</sup>

Pestilence, *The Black Death*, had killed one third of the population of Paris in 1348 during its first sweep across Europe and had returned, to become a recurring plague. Twentieth century mystic Abd-Ru-Shin describes human anguish as the portal through which the Grail Seeker passes.

*Some part of the great Creation in dire distress, suffering and ardent appeals*



*rise to the Creator, then a Servant of the Vessel is sent forth as a bearer of this Love to intervene helpfully in the spiritual need. What floats merely as a myth then enters a legend in the Work of Creation, as a living reality.<sup>7</sup>*



# II

## Symbols, Visions and Voices

Unlike stories from Arthurian mythology, Joan's life has been historically authenticated, is extremely well documented, and marks the official close of the *Age of Chivalry*. The symbols and celestial personalities associated with the mystic elements of her legacy were assigned enormous power throughout the development of Judeo-Christian culture.

During the sixth century, the Abbot of Reims who baptized Clovis (the first King of the Franks) was Saint Remy, the patron saint of Joan's village parish. Three primary metaphysical symbols emerged from this first coronation that would bind the French monarchy to the Roman Catholic Church for centuries to come.

First, Reims Cathedral became the one and only sanctuary accepted by the people of France as that country's legitimate coronation site. Second, a holy vial known as the *Ampulla* was (and still is) kept in the abbey of Reims. It contains the chrism known as the *Sacre*, (consecrated oil), that has sanctified every French coronation since the anointing of Clovis. The legend of the *Ampulla* says that the *Sacre* was sent directly from God to Saint Remy, carried in the beak of a dove.

Origins of the third symbol representing this union, the *fleur de lys*, have been traced to St. Denis, and to an abundant number of other legends. Associated with the kings of France since the sixth century, the use of the "golden lilies" to identify French royalty began with Clovis, according to Gregory of Tours in his text from that period, *Historia Francorum*.<sup>8</sup>

Gregory's rendition of the story is found in a poem attributed to anonymous monks from the ancient abbey of Joyenval. Clovis, a Merovingian chieftain, was a pagan who resided in the castle of Montjoie near Paris with his Christian wife, Clothilda. During a pivotal battle, having been driven to his knees by Conflat, a local tyrant, Clovis became further distraught when he reached for his shield and found that each of the crescents in its design had been replaced by a golden lily.

Returning to the battle, he overcame his distrust of this new symbol as his strength had miraculously redoubled, and he won the fight. When Clovis questioned his wife about the significance of the mysterious *fleur de lys*, Clothilda answered, "It is the Holy Trinity that has given you this victory, so that from now on, the unity of the triple flowers shall be on your shield as a sign of your strength and your right to rule."<sup>9</sup>

When the fifteenth century dawned, a church tower rose from the center of each village in France. Bells rang out to announce the time of day, and to call Catholic congregants to Mass where they worshipped without Bibles. In this era of illiteracy among the peasantry, vital records; dates of birth, marriage and death often were unrecorded.

Parishioners, who were largely unfamiliar with the edicts of canon law, relied upon local priests to interpret the gospels. From 1378 to 1417, confusion reigned with the Church during the *papal schism*, when two popes (residing in Italy and in southern France), each claimed the right to ex-communicate the other. In 1417, with the installation of a third pope in Rome, Martin V, the schism officially ended, but loyalties within the Church remained divided.

During her childhood, Joan learned Church doctrine and biblical scripture at the knee of her devoutly Catholic mother, Isabelle. In Domremy, as in villages throughout Europe, ancient folk traditions were celebrated, interwoven with the Roman Catholic calendar of holy days.

Influences that shaped Joan's spirituality have been analyzed by theologians and historians for nearly six hundred years, but certain symbolic elements most essential to understanding the origins of her mysticism have until now, been either overlooked by biographers, or given a cursory glance and dismissed. For example, although Joan's own testimony bears direct witness to the contrary, Mary Gordon, professor of English at Barnard College, novelist, and author of *Joan of Arc*, a biography published in 2000 says of Joan,

*She...made no mention of devotion to the Virgin Mary, although Marian cults were popular during the period in which she lived. She related to Christ as 'her lord' but offered no details of personal intimacy and did not focus upon his Passion. In her moments of suffering, she did not link herself with the suffering of Jesus.*<sup>10</sup>

Significant evidence regarding Joan's devotion to the Virgin Mary is found in the records from both trials. Each Saturday, Joan was seen walking briskly uphill beyond her village, following a footpath that leads toward the northwest. Her destination was always the same; an ancient hermitage and shrine located in an isolated clearing. In this glade scattered with yellow wild flowers in spring, Joan (sometimes accompanied by her sister Catherine) gathered bouquets to place at the feet of the sculpture she adored, *Our Lady of Bermont*.

This gently smiling figure has been preserved and is held today inside a semi-private sanctuary beneath the vaulted nave of Domremy's *Basilique de Bois Chenu*, the nineteenth century basilica dedicated to Saint Joan of Arc. Painted in medieval polychrome, this sculpture is *Maria* as Joan first knew her, wearing a simple crown of faded gold.

Robed in rich hues of blue, magenta and red, *Our Lady of Bermont* stands poised before the viewer, cradling an animated, cherubic Jesus in the crook of her left arm. The source of his joyful expression at first appears to be the tiny bird he holds; but then it becomes clear, his attention is drawn to something else. Atop a slender scepter, grasped in his mother's right hand, a single golden *fleur de lys* holds his gaze, transfixed. For Joan, this symbol was identified with the *King of Heaven*, and with the kings of France.



*Jehanette*, the young mystic who meditated before these impressive images, would as the warrior *La Pucelle*, carry a field of golden *fleur de lys* strewn over the long, white battle standard that became a significant beacon for her soldiers. The names *Jhesus* and *Maria* were also prominently displayed in its design.

On her left index finger, she wore a ring given to her by her parents, engraved with three crosses and again, the names, *Jhesus* and *Maria*.<sup>11</sup> Five crosses would identify the *Sword of Saint Catherine* that came to Joan from mystic origins, out of the earth, much like *Excalibur* came to Arthur, from out of the stone.

During her stay in Vaucouleurs, while waiting for Sir Robert de Baudricourt to approve her request to depart for Chinon with armed escorts, Joan prayed before a limestone image of the Madonna that is held today inside a private crypt beneath the church that stands near his castle's ruins. Garnering support from local citizens who fed and clothed her, she was seen to disappear each day beneath the castle's sanctuary, into the crypt below. Witnesses reported that they saw her kneeling in solitude before a candle-lit altar with her head bowed, or with her face uplifted to meet the expressionless gaze of *Our Lady of the Vault*.<sup>12</sup>

Although it might be assumed that mystics pray alone, rely upon ritual, and use meditative techniques specifically to achieve altered states of consciousness, anthropological studies show that the phenomenon described as *gnosis* (direct knowledge of God) is not always received through the recipient's intention. An enormous body of research now shows that dramatic, transformative spiritual initiations sometimes strike without warning, outside the context of ritual or ceremony.<sup>13</sup>

Joan's first vision appeared in the garden of her family home during the course of an otherwise, ordinary afternoon. In her trial testimony, she described her emotions, upon being visited by the archangel from the Old Testament whose Hebrew name, *Mi-Col-El* translates into "Voice of God."<sup>14</sup>

*When I was thirteen, I had a voice from God to help me to govern myself. The first time, I was terrified. The voice came to me about noon: it was summer, and I was in my father's garden. I had not fasted the day before. I heard the voice on my right hand, towards the church. There was a great light all about. I vowed then to keep my virginity for as long as it should please God. I saw it many times before I knew that it was Saint Michael. Afterwards he taught me and showed me such things that I knew it was he. (Jeanne d'Arc)<sup>15</sup>*

Who is *Saint Michael*? His identity was not in question, during Joan's trial. Known to Western Europeans of every class during the Late Middle Ages, the monument dedicated to him in the eighth century on Normandy's coast where three rivers meet was created over centuries of time. *Le Mont St. Michel* rises toward heaven from the silt of circling tides, below. In this place where Brittany and Normandy are separated by the River Cousesnon, knights, monks, kings and pilgrims sought refuge through the ages, yet never have foreign invaders succeeded in overtaking it. At the time of Joan's birth, this was seen as evidence of Michael the Archangel's invincibility.

Another translation of the Hebrew name for Mi-Col-El, *He Who Is Like God*, is favored by contemporary Rabbi Morris B. Margolies who describes him as "...the archetype of all Jewish angels; guardian and lifesaver through all of the Rabbinic literature, Prince of Israel, the special guardian and role model of the Jewish people."<sup>16</sup>



*Merciful-and-forbearing Michael emerges from age-old Jewish literature as the commander-in-chief of the entire angelic host. In 3 Baruch, a book in the Pseudepigrapha, he is the angel who accepts the prayers and offerings of man and transmits them to God; a task contrary to a long-cherished Jewish belief that there are no intermediaries between man's prayers, and God.<sup>17</sup>*

In sculptures and paintings of Saint Michael, at times he is portrayed carrying the scales of justice that weigh human souls. More often he holds his spike, a calm warrior in armor, hair streaming, giant wings unfurled. Poised to strike the entity braced beneath his foot, Saint Michael's foe is depicted sometimes as a reptilian creature, but more often, a diabolical human form. This image presents the Archangel in his role at the head of God's protective forces, the "victorious one" who casts the embodiment of evil out of heaven. Joan described his earliest visitations.

*He was not alone; but duly attended by heavenly angels. I saw them with the eyes of my body as well as I see you. And when they left me I wept, and wished that they might have taken me with them. And I kissed the ground where they had stood, to do them reverence.*

*He told me that Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret would come to me, and that I must follow their counsel; that they were appointed to guide and*

*counsel me in what I had to do, and that I must believe what they would tell me, for it was at our Lord's command. (Jeanne d'Arc)<sup>18</sup>*

The rejection of this testimony, based on its implausibility, refutes an essential Judeo-Christian tenet that accepts divine intervention as integral to human experience. Early in the Old Testament, angels sent by God descend toward earth, to serve humanity. According to ancient Hebrew scripture, choirs of angels are neatly arranged into nine orders in three tiers, with three levels in each tier. Archangels *Michael, Gabriel, Raphael* and *Uriel* belong to the eighth of these nine choirs that descend in a specific order; *seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominations, virtues, powers, principalities, archangels* and *angels*.<sup>19</sup>

When Saint Michael identified the two angels who would follow his visitation to become Joan's personal advocates and advisors, he named women who had lived in the fourth century, a period when relatively advanced, literate cultures thrived in Rome and Constantinople. The life stories of *Catherine of Alexandria*, (Egypt) and *Margaret of Antioch* (Syria) were passed on verbally, until the ninth century when their popularity began to swell first in England, and then in France.

During the High Middle Ages, Catherine and Margaret were among the most popular of saints. They were listed among the *Fourteen Heavenly Helpers*; those who were venerated and sought to intercede by people in extreme need. Although consistent documentation about their lives is lacking, elaborately detailed frescoes illustrate their life stories on the walls of ancient European churches, where their images are often sculpted in stone or illuminated in stained glass.

Filled with glory, pathos and tragedy, the legends of Catherine and Margaret tell of two young women who share many commonalities with one another, and with Joan. Removed from the Roman Catholic calendar's list of venerated saints by the council of Vatican II in 1965, their legends and influence have nonetheless, survived into the twenty-first century. Their exact dates of births and deaths are unknown, and conflicting references by hagiographers that name the Roman officials who ordered their executions, only add confusion.

Although Catherine and Margaret most likely did not know of one another during their lifetimes, they were similarly blessed with extraordinary assets and cursed by the same fate. Strongly independent young women, well educated and articulate; they shared the common attributes of intelligence, courage, faith, beauty and charisma. The following descriptions summarize the most consistently repeated elements of their stories.



*Catherine of Alexandria* was born of nobility, and is thought to have been the niece of Emperor *Constantine* and *Sabinella*, daughter of the King of Egypt. The advanced culture of Alexandria had survived the tragic burning of its great libraries, and Catherine was allowed to become a well educated woman who debated the theories of Plato with other philosophers. Her spiritual conversion took place when a vision of the Virgin Mary convinced her to become a firm disciple of the Christian faith.

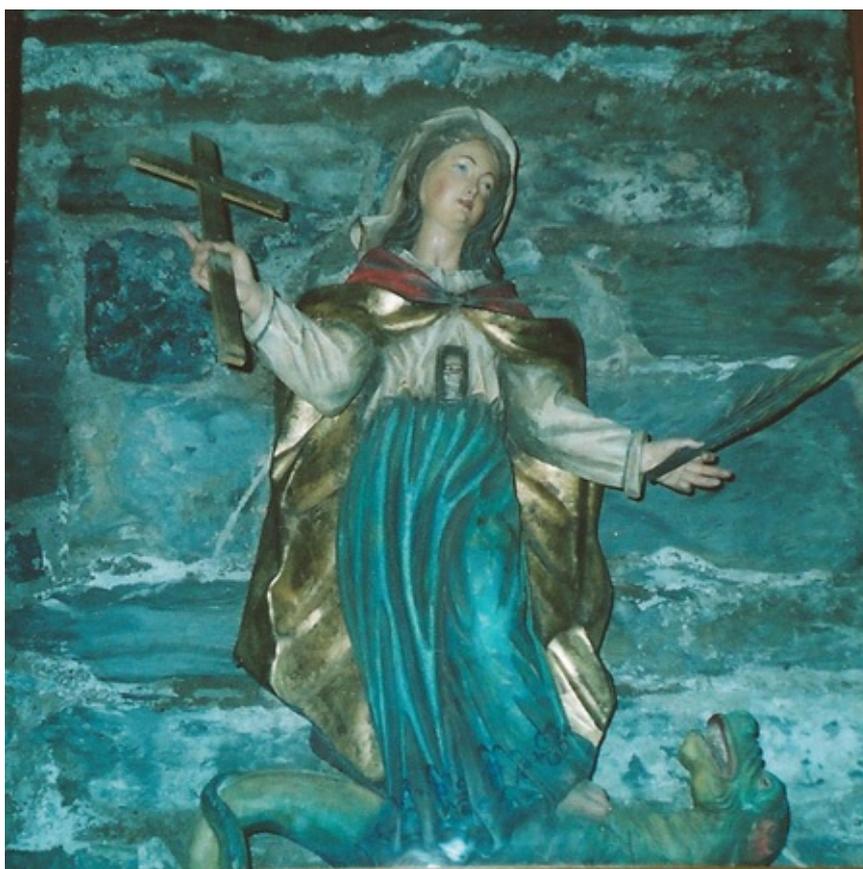
Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius Valerius *Maxentius* ruled from 306 to 312, and during the early part of his reign, was known for mercilessly persecuting Christians. When he became powerfully attracted to the eighteen year old Catherine, she embarrassed him before members of his court, convincing them that his belief system rested in false gods. Meeting her challenge, he called in over fifty of the most learned philosophers in Alexandria to argue against her. When the entire crowd was converted by Catherine *en masse*, Maxentius executed them all, in keeping with his reputation for cruelty.

Smitten by Catherine's beauty and brains, Maxentius invited her to become his consort. Upon refusing him, she was thrown into prison and left to starve in isolation. Each day, a dove flew into her cell, bringing just enough food to sustain her life. Provoked by curiosity, the emperor's wife visited Catherine in prison, escorted by army officers, soldiers and guards. When they all became converts, the furious Maxentius called for their executions, and sentenced Catherine to be killed on a spiked wheel.

Miraculously, the instrument of torture broke, and although she escaped this second attempt to take her life, she was later beheaded. In France, an annual tradition still takes place each year, when girls in adolescence announce their unmarried status by donning the “Saint Catherine’s Cap”. She is the patron saint of young women, philosophers, scholars, clergy, millers, spinners and wheelwrights.

*The Shrine of Saint Catherine*, a Greek Orthodox monastery at the base of Mount Sinai, Egypt was founded in 527 by the Byzantine emperor Justinian.<sup>20</sup> This walled city still attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year. Inside the shrine, priests and scholars maintain a collection of sacred texts so vast that it is considered second only to those of the Vatican. Catherine’s remains were said to have been carried to the Sinai by angels. Now it is said that the angels were in fact, the monks who established the shrine.

*Margaret of Antioch*, revered as *Marina* in the Eastern Orthodox Church holds a quill pen in some portraits, symbolic of her education and skill with language. Although she began her life as the daughter of a pagan priest, when she converted to Christianity and spoke openly of her loyalty to “the tribe of the Nazarene”, her father threw her out of his house. Living as a shepherdess, she became a passionate public speaker whose faith filled orations attracted large crowds and captured the attention of *Olybrius*, Governor of Antioch.



After spurning his advances, she was turned over to Roman guards, thrown into prison and swallowed by a dragon. Legend says, she used a crucifix to pierce the interior belly of the beast, and then burst forth with the command; “Lie, foul fiend, under the foot of a woman!”

When Margaret survived further attempts to take her life by drowning and by fire, she showed the same resilience that had been demonstrated by Catherine of Alexandria and

was sentenced to the same death, by decapitation. People who had witnessed Margaret's failed executions became converts, and were subsequently executed. The suitor she is said to have rejected, *Anicius Olybrius*, was not the Emperor of Rome whose brief reign took place in 472; but *Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius*, of the powerful Anician family of Italy, who governed Antioch in 395.<sup>21</sup>

This factor would indicate that Margaret's life took place at the end of the fourth century, but some hagiographers have suggested she lived even earlier. She is accompanied by a dragon in most portraits and sculptures, and is invoked as the sole patron saint of women who enter the throes of childbirth. Her reliquaries are venerated today in European cathedrals dedicated to her name. Two of the most prominent are found in the Italian cities of Montefiascone and Santa Margherita Ligure.

Under the Church of Saint Remy's Romanesque arches, a carving of Saint Margaret is mounted not far from the enormous stone font where Joan was baptized in her infancy. Here, Margaret is seen as a country girl who, like Joan tended flocks of sheep during her youth. Without a crown, she stands gracefully holding a quill. Joan also saw and touched a statue inside the church dedicated to Saint Catherine in the neighboring village of Maxey.

Some biographers suggest that pressed for concrete information about her visions during the trial, Joan's lifelong familiarity with these ancient saints triggered the subconscious invention of their identities as those of her Voices. Extensive testimonies recorded in both trials refute that theory.

Joan did not reveal the nature of her direct interactions with Saints Michael, Catherine and Margaret until she was required to do so, by the court. In that time and place, these invisible beings were idealized. Their traveling reliquaries were adored by the population of Western Europe. Excessive numbers of questions were asked of Joan by the court about her frequent, intimate encounters with them. Although her patience was often tried during questioning, in attempting to explain the ineffable, her words contained sensory descriptions.

*Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret had rich crowns on their heads. They spoke well and fairly, and their voices are beautiful...sweet and soft. The name by which they often named me was 'Jehanne the Maid, child of God.'*  
(*Jeanne d'Arc*)<sup>22</sup>

That Michael the Archangel, Catherine of Alexandria and Margaret of Antioch were identified by *La Pucelle* as the *Voices* who directed the course of her mission from beginning to end, does not seem arbitrary when considering their combined attributes. The transformation from *Jehanette*, obedient daughter, seamstress and shepherdess to *La Pucelle*, heroic military leader, required her to acquire specific skills; many of them masculine, all of them competitive, and at a speed that can only be described as, "superhuman". Men in power who attempted to block Joan's forward momentum in any arena found an extraordinarily articulate and physically formidable opponent.

# III

## Through the Shaman's Lens

**A**lthough her mystic legacy is identified with medieval Judeo-Christian references and symbols, Joan's behavior clearly has not been understood by the Western culture she came out of; not by feminists or historians, not even by theologians from within her own tradition. At the turn of this millennium, she was portrayed in feature films and scholarly biographies alike, as a zealot whose visions and Voices are most often discounted as the inventions of a vivid, brilliant imagination.

The increasing volume of inter-disciplinary research exploring the dynamics of *shamanism* is a branch of study that offers an alternative method of examining Joan's mastery over multiple dimensions. Her spiritual autonomy is consistent with that of the *shaman*, a healer who acts alone, on behalf of others, operating as a mediator between the sacred and secular worlds.

Joan's interaction with spiritual guides who appeared to her each day, from age thirteen until her death, is a factor that sets her apart from other Christian mystics who have most often operated within the confines and dictates of a specific religious order or sect. Nonetheless, *Encarta Encyclopedia* defines *shaman* as a "religious specialist."<sup>23</sup> According to contemporary author, psychologist and teacher Jean Houston, shamanism is "one of the oldest forms of religious life."<sup>24</sup> She sees shamanistic practice as "...pre-political, for all religions begin as spiritual experiences, which then become politicized and bureaucratized."<sup>25</sup>



The common characteristics that define shamans from every era and continent vary only slightly, although every shaman's personal mode of operation is singularly unique. The sole purpose of the shaman is also that of the mystic; to provide selfless aid, healing and active service to the community. Experiencing visions is not the goal, nor is achieving a state of ecstasy.

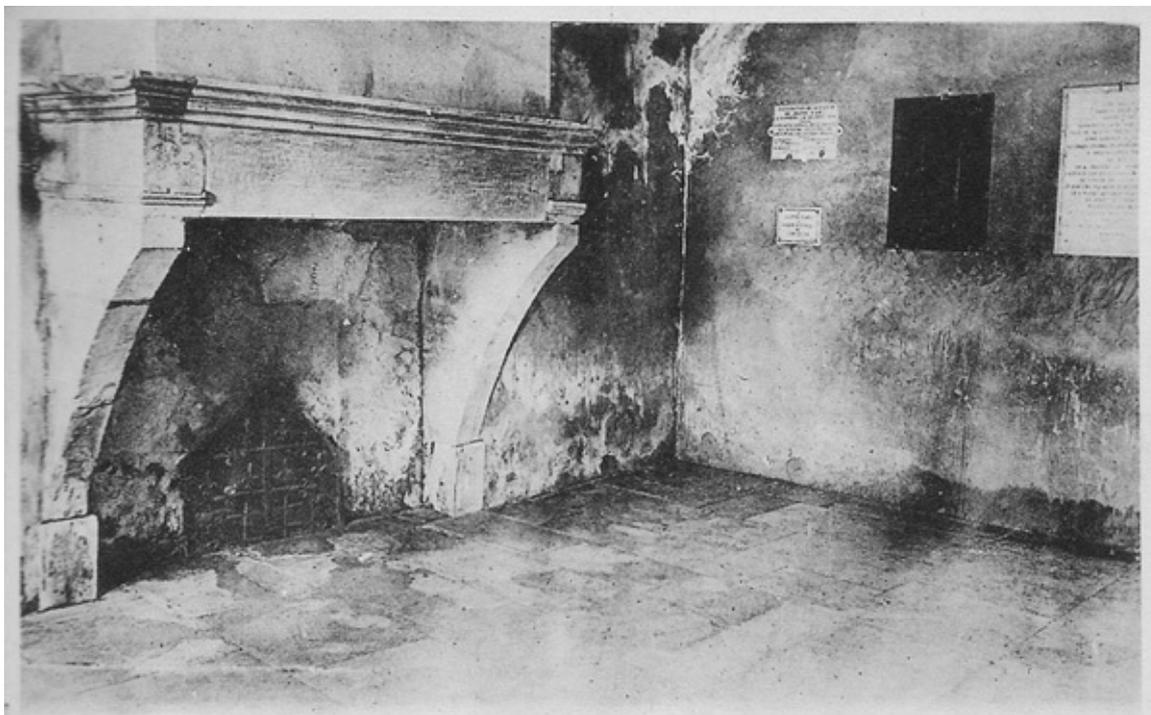
Scholars in the field of shamanic studies, the fastest growing branch of anthropology concur; the shaman's fundamental purpose is to bring healing or regeneration of the sacred to the community. "Without this humane and practical application," says Jean Houston, "the shaman is merely crazy at best or unworthy at worst."<sup>26</sup>

Within their respective cultures, the role of the mystic is similar to that of that of the tribal shaman, (a title that refers to a male or female practitioner.) Anthropologist Michael Harner, Ph.D., founder of the *Center for Shamanic Studies* in Connecticut, has characterized shamanism as "a method, not a religion."<sup>27</sup> Shamanic initiation often takes place near the age of adolescence, but service in that capacity cannot take place until mastery is obtained, usually after passing through puberty.

Most scholars agree, in shamanistic practice, there are two common elements at work: 1) the spiritual autonomy of the shaman, and 2) the consistent manner in which the assignment of this role comes to the practitioner. Shamans receive physical signs from the

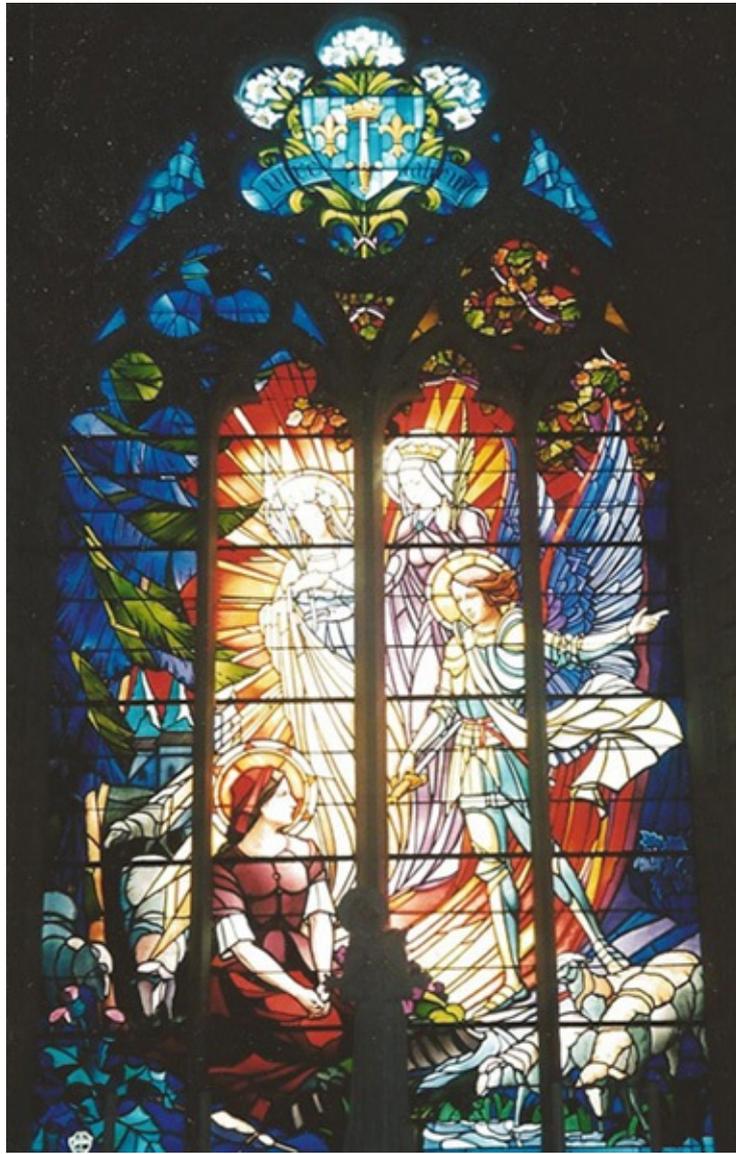
unseen world, and the call to service entails an initial dramatic, super-normal experience, followed by a period of education by spiritual guides who transmit power and special knowledge to the initiate for the purpose of serving others.

During this intensive tutorial period, the student learns to disseminate information and to trust these escorts to provide safe passage between dimensions. The duration given to study and practice prior to making a public debut as an active shaman is of course, specific to each individual.



The original performing artists of the world, shamans who step forward to act on the part of others by taking on this role cannot afford to fail, or credibility is lost. Adequate time for preparation is essential, and as with any form of intensive study or practice, sometimes years of seclusion and isolation are sought by the student, so that focus can be maintained.

For Joan, the possibility of a protracted period of isolation did not exist. Her home In Domremy was typically modest, with a dirt floor and little space, crowded with four siblings, extended family and wayfaring strangers to whom Joan would willingly offer her bed. Solitude could be found only in the natural world, outdoors; while tending of her father's flock of sheep and in her visits to the hermitage on the hill, the shrine dedicated to *Our Lady of Bermont*.



During her trial, Joan testified that although she had received angelic visitations since the age of thirteen, she did not disclose them to her best friend Hauviette, or to her mother, or to anyone in her village parish. Keeping her impending mission a secret for nearly four years, she left her rural village under cover, without asking permission from either of her parents, or from the priest to whom she confessed at Easter.

Joan gave ultimate authority to her personal understanding of divine guidance. She was unfamiliar with the governmental structure of the *Church Militant*, officials ordained to enforce canon law. Under oath, in every page of her testimony, she stated that the speedy trajectory of her mission was at every turn, guided by God's messengers.

Mystics and shamans must maintain discretion, since the information they receive from divine sources cannot under any circumstances be abused or used for personal gain. Such an alteration of intention becomes *sorcery*, the polar opposite of mysticism and shamanism.

Although sorcerers, mystics and shamans all claim direct interaction with unseen guidance, the sorcerer's ill-formed intentions thrive in the shadows of darkness. Attracting competitive energetic exchanges, the sorcerer seeks to display power and control over others, with group seduction as the ultimate goal. Conversely, the shaman acts without selfish intention, and always on behalf of the community.

As a human being who is fallible, the penalty is high for any shaman or mystic who succumbs to temptation by making self-centered choices, becomes manipulative with acquired power, refuses to follow guidance, or veers even slightly from the path of integrity. Since formal recognition of success is paramount to the effectiveness of shamanic service, the withdrawal of support by the community's leaders may diminish or even eliminate the individual's continued ability to act in this capacity. Joan's decline was triggered by the refusal of Charles VII to support her efforts, following his coronation.

As shamans and mystics proceed to work within alternate realms of experience, their efforts are often made at great personal risk. While their energies are directed toward helping others, shocks and confrontations must be absorbed; information received from other realms must be brought back to the ordinary world and communicated effectively, without creating chaos. This factor is especially significant, because research shows that the shamanistic state of consciousness (SSC) as defined by Dr. Michael Harner, "does not at all involve paralyzing the left brain and the rational faculties."<sup>28</sup>

Witnesses confirm that regardless of conditions, Joan maintained focus and communicated clearly, indicating the absence of *dissociation*, or a fragmented psychological state. When shamans are in communication with spiritual guides, there is little evidence of mental blackout or emotional partitioning that prevents functioning in the physical world while simultaneously, they receive information from other realms. In other words, shamans do not, as a rule, experience the takeover of control by an outside entity, (as described by mediums.) They do not become possessed, nor is there a period of amnesia. Harner explains, "Instead, the shaman is the 'master of spirits.' The spirits work for the shaman; he or she possesses them, rather than the reverse."<sup>29</sup>

During her trial, when Joan was asked whether or not her Voices had always come each time that she called on them she answered, "I have never had need of them and not had them."<sup>30</sup> They came to her each day, sometimes a number of times within twenty-four hours; yet witnesses report that she went about her life without noticeably dissociating or psychologically *splitting*.

Joan was seen to fall into a state of prayerful rapture, rather than into trance. Her overt behavior did not reveal an altered state, nor did she speak excessively. Her work was shamanic in that it was initiated for only one purpose, to restore her community to well-being and wholeness. She actively engaged Heaven's help, to heal all that she knew of Earth.

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