



The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc

Larissa Juliet Taylor

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France's great heroine and England's great scourge: whether a lunatic, a witch, a religious icon, or a skilled soldier and leader, Joan of Arc's contemporaries found her as extraordinary and fascinating as the legends that abound about her today. But her life has been so endlessly cast and recast that we have lost sight of the remarkable girl at the heart of it—a teenaged peasant girl who, after claiming to hear voices, convinced the French king to let her lead a disheartened army into battle. In the process she changed the course of European history.

In *The Virgin Warrior*, Larissa Juliet Taylor paints a vivid portrait of Joan as a self-confident, charismatic and supremely determined figure, whose sheer force of will electrified those around her and struck terror into the hearts of the English soldiers and leaders. The drama of Joan's life is set against a world where visions and witchcraft were real, where saints could appear to peasants, battles and sieges decided the fate of kingdoms and rigged trials could result in burning at the stake. Yet in her short life, Joan emboldened the French soldiers and villagers with her strength and resolve. A difficult, inflexible leader, she defied her accusers and enemies to the end. From her early years to the myths and fantasies that have swelled since her death, Taylor teases out a nuanced and engaging story of the truly irresistible "ordinary" girl who rescued France.

The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc Details

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Author : Larissa Juliet Taylor

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Emeline says

I had to read this book for class and was pleasantly surprised. It was a fascinating account of Joan of Arc. Talk about female empowerment. Joan had to prove herself time and time again that she was worthy to lead the French army. She was truly a hero to France and a martyr. I highly recommend this book to everyone!!

Rachel says

Probably the best bio of Joan out there, that's accessible. Readable, mostly well researched, and very clear.

Having said that, it still frustrated me. Particularly silly errors like suggesting that Joan may have tied her bedsheets together when jumping from the tower without mentioning that that particular rumour seems to have originated in the following century.

Also, the footnotes made it very difficult sometimes to follow up individual sources. I understand that it's easier for the author to cite a large French volume of sources, but not so easy for us!

Mostly, it didn't give enough of a sense (to me) of the very real confusions that historians still have over Joan's life and character. Yes, loads of sources exist. But they're hugely ambiguous, and while Taylor did address this, I think that the fact that this was popular history meant that she glossed over some of the controversies and ambiguities that make Joan so interesting.

Joy Wilson says

Joan of Arc is certainly an interesting historical figure. Taylor has written one of the first book to critically examine all the evidence to determine who the real Joan was. It is difficult to find the person amidst all the politics and hagiography since her death at the stake. I have read a few books over the years about The Maid, but this is the first to really give me a good idea about her real personality and the events that shaped her. What will remain a mystery is her claim to be guided by God. It is hard to imagine that sheer will and charisma could have allowed her to be so successful at her age during that era. I really appreciated the effort Taylor put in to give clear, non-angelic motivations for all the players in the drama. Her depth of research is clear and the story is well written. If you are looking for a quality, critical examination of Joan of Arc, I would certainly recommend this book.

Joanne Zienty says

Heretic, saint. Manipulated dreamer, cunning warrior. Stubborn adolescent, bold leader. Joan of Arc has been painted in all these terms and more, by writers as varied as Shakespeare, Voltaire, Schiller, Shaw and Twain... and even the script jockeys for The Simpsons. In The Virgin Warrior, Larissa Juliet Taylor presents

an image of the "real" Joan -- or as close to the real as we can get for a heroine who lived over 500 years ago. She strips away the sanctification (and demonization) to show us the teenage girl who was too headstrong and determined to stay in her little village when adventure and a mission called. We see her rebellious streak, her conviction, and the flaws that led to her capture and death. "Go boldly" was Joan's unofficial motto, the words she used to spur on her soldiers. While she does a fine job of presenting Joan, one wishes that Taylor had been a bit more bold in her writing...her prose lacks flair and fails to bring out the color and flavor of 15th Century France.

Stephen McQuiggan says

Witch or lunatic? Virgin or slut? Warrior or saint? The girl from Domremy rides into history, and over 500 years later still manages to fan the flames of controversy. A story so bizarre you just couldn't make it up. One of the main contentions of her supposed heresy aimed at her during her trial was her penchant for wearing male clothing, but Taylor convincingly argues the case of identity and highlights the despicable tactics used against a teenage girl. One of the most interesting aspects of the book is how the legend came to be staged, by Yolande and others, before taking on a life of its own; a self fulfilling prophecy. Taylor posits that the Maid came to believe her own press and it cost her her life. Fascinating and disturbing.

Emma says

I like to read non-fiction and learn a thing or two. I also like to read about women's lives. That said, I'm afraid I didn't finish this, not because it's badly-written, just because I reached the end of my interest in Joan of Arc about a third of the way in.

I would think if you were very interested (by which I mean inordinately interested) in the life of Joan of Arc, this is a meticulously-researched, fact-filled account of her life, mission, trial and death.

Mark says

I do subscribe to a history magazine for limited period, then I buy a few copies in the shop until they come up with a new offer for a subscription usually accompanied with a free history book, this time it was this one. And knowing the general idea and character she seemed like an interesting person to read about. Especially as her role is about the religious history of Europe which is always a favorite of mine.

Sheila says

Taylor definitely smashes the fictionalized popularization of the story of Joan of Arc. She maintains that the "truth is more powerful than imagination" and I was on the edge of my seat through the chapters about Joan's military endeavors. It certainly read like a drama, but was indeed all true. I did find some chapters static such as "The Mission" and the "King of the Maid" but that is due to my own disinterest. What is most fascinating about Joan's story is her intelligence and wit, which Taylor examines throughout the book as she provides practical explanations for Joan's "miracles" and "voices" from God that instructed her to save the city of Orléans. As someone who knew nothing about Joan of Arc, this book was definitely informative. I

recommend this book for students or for curious souls wanting to know Joan's real story. Joan is such an inspirational figure and certainly one of a kind.

Psyche Ready says

I was looking for an objective, evidence-based biography of the life of Joan of Arc, and this was perfect. Taylor writes clearly and succinctly (many biographies of Joan are painfully long), if academically. Any biographer must interpret the available evidence to some degree, and weave a narrative from it; Taylor, however, carefully avoids speculation and over-interpretation of the facts. The story of Joan's life is so strange, mysterious, and remarkable that there really is no need to embellish it, and I appreciate that Taylor leaves those mysterious spaces unexplained so I could fill them in on my own. She offers a "further reading" section that lists other interpretations of Joan's life for the reader who might want something more literary or theoretical. Finally, Taylor does a close reading of Joan's recorded statements from her trial and her life as a soldier, and these sources clearly portray a young woman who is in no way naive, but is witty, intelligent, clever, driven, and remarkably gifted. These characteristics are somewhat at odds with the traditional and popular understanding of who Joan was, and I am grateful to know the improbably bold figure Taylor describes.

Simon says

Solid research, and Taylor offers solutions to many of the puzzles that surround the life of the Maid. She takes the sensible position that we simply cannot know what Joan experienced when she heard her Voices, but she does point out that many of the notable moments --- her recognition of the Dauphin from amongst the group of courtiers in which he had blended --- were staged. Taylor also demonstrates what Joan *did* as a warrior. Her main achievement is the account of the trials, both the court that condemned her and the tribunal that rehabilitated Joan twenty-five years after her death at the stake.

Was Joan a saint? Taylor prudently does not engage the subject, although the reader can certainly draw conclusions from this book. If it has a weakness, it is in the delineation of people like La Hire and Dunois. The reader is plunged *in media res*, and if you don't have at least some grasp of the Hundred Years War, it will be slow going for a bit. Taylor does provide a list of the main actors at the end of the book, so the information is there. The reader has to mine for it, though.

Recommended!

Alexis says

I believe this has made it to my favorite as far as biographies on Joan of Arc go. I loved that it was straight up factual without embellishment. I also loved how primary sources were used describing her. People who were actually with her at some point.

This book allows you to draw your own conclusions about the full truth behind Joan's story by giving you the facts. Was she really divinely guided, was she insane, or was she a driven young woman who used wit and intelligence to carve her place in the world? Either way she is a fascinating woman.

Anne Van says

The Joan of Arc story once more, but this time completely based on primary sources! Nice collection of photographs of so many cathedrals and castles, still existing unchanged, that play their part in this amazing chronicle.

Lesley Dahlseng says

Any great historian must approach legend with objectivity. Any great writer must respect the reader's love affair with legend. Therefore, Taylor (author) had a narrow road to tread. Taylor's extensive research for The Virgin Warrior and her ability to dissect events otherwise attributed as miraculous into practical possibilities is impressive. No stone was left unturned. Whether Joan of Arc's convictions and abilities were divine or otherwise, the life of Joan is one at which to marvel. Very well written. Though in the end, Taylor's pursuit to remove any Divine presumptions may have overshot the goal of objectivity and resulted in a slight overdose of cynicism.

Madison says

I found this historical account of Joan of Arc's life very interesting. She comes across as an intelligent and talented girl taking advantage of whatever she can to gain a position in the world. However, there just isn't that much information or too many records of her life, so Taylor tends to base some of her assumptions on scanty primary sources. For its flaws, though, Taylor accomplished her mission of an accurate account of Joan the girl, instead of Joan the saint, well.

Pat says

An easy read and delightful in its use of origin source material. Would have appreciated some of the characters of the major players in her life being flushed out a bit more in the book rather than being consigned to an appendix. I thought the illustrations (maps) could have been a little more comprehensive (and better placed) in showing all of the places Joan went on her brief journey through life. As a Catholic, I am deeply ashamed of what was done in the name of God to this woman.
