
NEW TITLES

History

JOAN OF ARC:
The Legend and the Reality
 by Frances Gies
 Harper, 1981
 306 pp. \$14.95

JOAN OF ARC:
**The Image of Female
 Heroism**
 by Marina Warner
 Knopf, 1981
 349 pp. \$19.95



*Joan of Arc, May 1429.
 Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.
 From Joan of Arc by Marina Warner.*

Mark Twain described her as "by far the most extraordinary person the human race has ever produced," while George Bernard Shaw called her "the queerest fish among the eccentric worthies of the Middle Ages." Joan of Arc has been the subject of over 70 books published or reissued since 1970 alone. These two by Gies and Warner deserve notice. Gies, a Washington, D.C., historian, stays close to the chronology: Joan's childhood in Domremy, her first appearance in Charles VII's court in 1429 (where she reputedly identified Charles hidden among his courtiers), her part in raising the English-Burgundian siege of Orleans, her ecclesiastical trial and execution for heresy in 1431, and the hearing 25 years later that cleared her of that charge. Gies weighs the evidence for the often conflicting legends—Joan's visions of St. Michael and St. Margaret, her skill as a military commander—and concludes with a chapter on the treatment of Joan in literature and art from the 15th century to the present. By contrast, Warner eschews the chronological approach. Instead, she compares Joan with other men and women who have assumed the role of prophet, virgin, knight, heretic, harlot, amazon, or saint. As a prophet, Joan dealt in concrete prediction (the time and place of her wounding, for example) rather than in the sweeping and virtually unverifiable apocalyptic prophecies favored by contemporary seers; as a visionary, she had visitations too tangible and intimate for the more abstract tastes of 15th-century church authorities. Neither author uses her subject as the basis for a feminist tract. Nor does either claim the final word. As Warner, a London-based critic and historian, puts it, Joan belongs to the "splendour of the unaccountable, the particular, the anarchical."