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Valérie Toureille, *Jeanne d'Arc*. Paris: Perrin, 2020. 425 pp. €25.00 (pb). ISBN 9782262063948; €17.99 (ebook). ISBN 9782262087265.

Review by Craig Taylor, University of York.

One hundred and seventy-nine biographies of Joan of Arc were published between 1889 and 1988.[1] Since then, eminent French historians and writers led by Colette Beaune, Olivier Bouzy, Franck Collard, Xavier Hélyary, and Philippe Contamine have all published both scholarly and popular biographies of Joan, [2] as have Anglophones like Kelly Devries, Larissa Taylor, and Helen Castor.[3] So there are obvious questions regarding what any new biographical study can bring to this crowded table. But Valérie Toureille's *Jeanne d'Arc* certainly earns its place alongside the existing books by painting an unusually rich portrait of the military and political context into which the Pucelle emerged.

Toureille's biography recounts the celebrated story of Joan, starting with her arrival at Orléans in April 1429 to assist in defending the city against the English before moving backwards to discuss her childhood in Domrémy and her journey to meet King Charles VII in March 1429. The story then resumes with Joan's involvement in the military actions at Jargeau, Beaugency and Patay, her journey to Reims for the coronation of Charles in July 1429, the unsuccessful attack upon Paris in September and her campaign against Perrinet Gressart that winter before her military career was ended by her capture at Compiègne in March 1430. The book then concludes with a detailed account of Joan's captivity and trial for heresy at Rouen, culminating in her execution on 30 May 1431.

The unique selling point of this particular biography of Joan is the expertise of the author regarding the political and military context for the remarkable story of the Pucelle. Toureille has written extensively about the impact of war and violence in fifteenth-century France and the soldiers and mercenaries with whom Joan interacted during her short and remarkable military career. Most notably, Toureille has published important research on Robert de Sarrebrück, an ally of Robert de Baudricourt, captain of Vaucouleurs, who was the first important aristocrat to throw his weight behind Joan and support her journey to Chinon to meet Charles VII.[4]

Toureille's knowledge and understanding of this context provides an extremely solid foundation for her account. The narrative is peppered with her efforts to provide the reader with detailed background information about every one of the key characters, most notably in the fifth chapter that offers both a potted history of the difficult years between 1415 and 1429 that led to the crisis into which Joan inserted herself, but also a long list of sketches of the French captains who fought

alongside her. This material is both scholarly and informative, though Toureille's fascination with all of these minor characters, along with repeated pauses to fill in the historical context, sometimes disrupts the flow of the narrative and also tends to drown out the central story of Joan. This is the kind of material that previous biographers like Régine Pernoud have carefully placed in appendices and that fills the pages of the definitive reference book published by Contamine, Bouzy and Hélyar in 2012.[5]

Behind this lies the unusual and original way in which Toureille structures this famous story. Rather than present Joan's life in a simple chronological fashion, Toureille opens with Joan's breaking of the English siege of Orléans, before then stepping backwards to discuss Joan's origins and her first encounters with Charles VII and his advisors. This certainly ensures that the narrative opens with a bang, launching the reader into the story at its most dramatic point, the high point of Joan's successes. But it forces Toureille to fill in a great deal of missing context as the narrative progresses and also foregrounds the military dimensions of Joan's story at the expense of other important themes including the nature of her voices and her decision to wear male clothing. Indeed, if the best parts of this biography are the careful discussions of the military context, the weakest concern Joan's piety, revelations, and identity which are a trifle mechanical and certainly lack the thoughtfulness and sophistication of recent scholarship. For example, chapter three offers a cursory discussion of Joan's revelations, accepting the simple identification of her first voice to St. Michael and completely ignoring the compelling re-evaluation of those arguments by Karen Sullivan.[6] The sixth chapter examines the contemporary debate about whether Joan was a "prophétesse ou enchanteresse" (p. 162) without any reference to the crucial theological framework offered by *discretio spirituum* as discussed by Dyan Elliott, Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, Nancy McLoughlin, and countless other scholars.[7] And the discussion of Joan's clothing in chapter eight does not engage with the energetic debates about this controversial subject led by experts like Susan Crane.[8]

It is also striking that this biography makes extensive use of the testimony offered by witnesses at the Nullification Trial without offering the reader a great deal of context to evaluate that evidence.[9] The story of Joan presented in this book ends with her execution at Rouen in May 1431 and Toureille never analyses how and why her family, friends and acquaintances came to speak on the record about Joan over twenty years later. Like many other biographers of Joan, Toureille simply cuts and pastes statements by those witnesses without asking any deeper questions. So, for example, chapter five examines the biographies of Joan's military companions, but Toureille never pauses to wonder why some of these men were asked to testify before the Nullification Trial but others who were still alive were not called to speak. And in chapter ten, Toureille cites the evidence that witnesses gave in 1456 regarding Pierre Cauchon's efforts to gather information in the Lorraine about Joan before her heresy trial but fails to notice that none of the villagers who were supposedly questioned by Cauchon's men were able to remember that when interrogated in 1456. Above all, Toureille does not consider the complex set of factors that shaped the testimony of clerical witnesses about their own involvement in Joan's trial, from the self-interested need to blame others to the clear tramlines established by the questions that they were asked (and not asked) by those running the Nullification Trial.

Ultimately, this is a scholarly book that will be of particular value to those interested in the military and political dimensions of Joan of Arc's remarkable story. It is much more than a popular biography because of Toureille's expertise in those areas. The index is a little limited,

only identifying the names of people, and the bibliography is short and focused almost exclusively upon scholarship written in French. But the endnotes are rich with useful information.

NOTES

[1] Nadia Margolis, *Joan of Arc in History, Literature and Film: A Select, Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 111-49.

[2] Colette Beaune, *Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris: Perrin, 2004) and *Jeanne d'Arc: Vérités et légendes* (Paris: Perrin, 2008); Olivier Bouzy, *Jeanne d'Arc: Mythes et réalités* (Paris: L'Atelier de l'Archer, 1999) and *Jeanne d'Arc. L'histoire à l'endroit* (Saint-Amand-Montrond: CLD, 2008), and *Jeanne d'Arc en son siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 2013); Franck Collard, *La passion de Jeanne d'Arc: Mémoires françaises de la Pucelle* (Paris: PUF, 2017); Philippe Contamine, Olivier Bouzy, and Xavier Hélary, eds. *Jeanne d'Arc. Histoire et dictionnaire* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2012); Philippe Contamine, *Jeanne d'Arc et son époque. Essais sur le XVe siècle français* (Paris: CERF, 2020). Also see Gerd Krumeich, *Jeanne d'Arc en vérité*, trans. Valentine Meunier (Paris: Tallandier, 2012).

[3] Kelly DeVries, *Joan of Arc: A Military Leader* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999); Larissa Juliet Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); and Helen Castor, *Joan of Arc: A History* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).

[4] Valérie Toureille, *Robert de Sarrebrück ou l'honneur d'un écorcheur (v. 1400-v. 1462)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2013), and "Deux Armagnacs aux confins du royaume. Robert de Sarrebrück et Robert de Baudricourt," *Revue du Nord* 402 (2013/4): 977-1001. "

[5] Régine Pernoud and Marie-Véronique Clin, *Joan of Arc: Her Story*, rev. and trans. Jeremy DuQuesnay Adams (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998) pp. 165-217 and Contamine, Bouzy and Hélary, eds., *Jeanne d'Arc: Histoire et dictionnaire*, pp. 491-1052.

[6] Karen Sullivan, *The Interrogation of Joan of Arc* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 21-41.

[7] Dyan Elliott, "Seeing Double: Jean Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," *American Historical Review* 107 (2002): 26-54; Yelena Mazour-Matusevich, "A Reconsideration of Jean Gerson's Attitude Toward Joan of Arc in Light of his Views on Popular Devotion," in Ann W. Astell and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., *Joan of Arc and Spirituality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 167-182; Nancy McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender: Rhetoric and Politics in Fifteenth-Century France* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[8] Susan Crane, *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

[9] There is limited serious scholarship on the Nullification Trial, but see Pierre Duparc, "Le Procès en Nullité et le Procès de Condamnation: étude juridique," in Pierre Duparc, ed., *Procès en nullité de la condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, vol. 5 (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1989), pp. 3-128; Wolfgang Müller, *Der Prozess Jeanne d'Arc. Quellen, Sachverhalt einschliesslich des zeit- und geistesgeschichtlichen Hintergrundes, Verurteilung und Rechtfertigung, rechtliche Würdigung und Schlussbemerkungen*, 4 vols. (Hamburg: Kovač, 2004), and his "Le procès de réhabilitation. Fut-il

'le vrai procès de Jeanne d'Arc?," *Francia* 34 (2007) : 207-13. I am currently completing a book on the Nullification Trial.

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