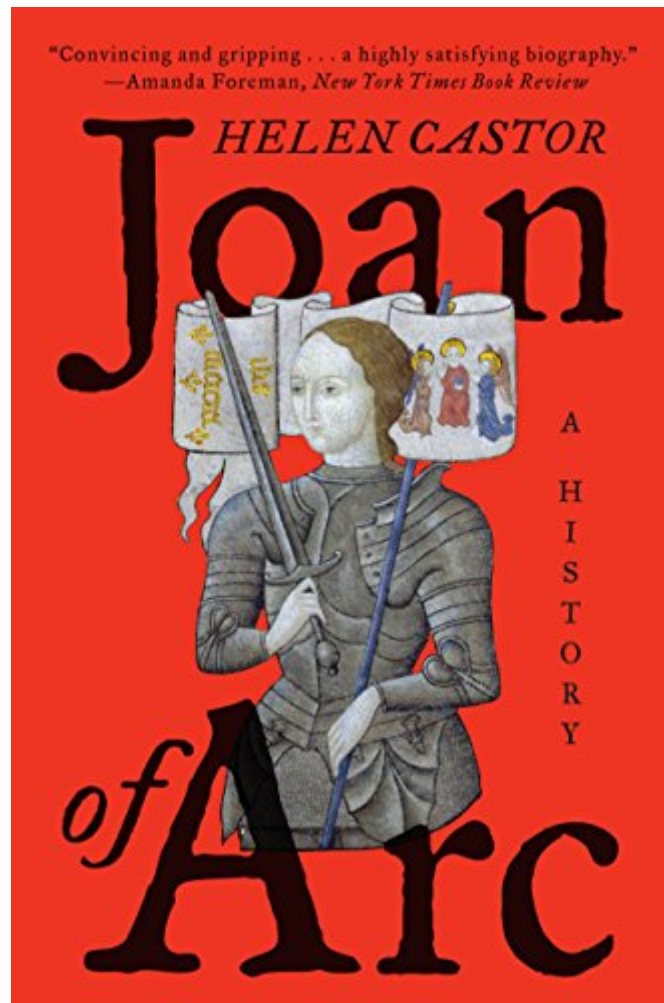




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Joan Of Arc: A History



Synopsis

From the author of the acclaimed *She-Wolves*, the complex, surprising, and engaging story of one of the most remarkable women of the medieval world—as never told before. Helen Castor tells afresh the gripping story of the peasant girl from Domremy who hears voices from God, leads the French army to victory, is burned at the stake for heresy, and eventually becomes a saint. But unlike the traditional narrative, a story already shaped by the knowledge of what Joan would become and told in hindsight, Castor's *Joan of Arc: A History* takes us back to fifteenth century France and tells the story forwards. Instead of an icon, she gives us a living, breathing woman confronting the challenges of faith and doubt, a roaring girl who, in fighting the English, was also taking sides in a bloody civil war. We meet this extraordinary girl amid the tumultuous events of her extraordinary world where no one—not Joan herself, nor the people around her—princes, bishops, soldiers, or peasants—knew what would happen next. Adding complexity, depth, and fresh insight into Joan's life, and placing her actions in the context of the larger political and religious conflicts of fifteenth century France, *Joan of Arc: A History* is history at its finest and a surprising new portrait of this remarkable woman. *Joan of Arc: A History* features an 8-page color insert.

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Customer Reviews

I place the countless biographies of Joan of Arc--a veritable literary industry--into two categories: those written by authors that seem to be clueless there are already countless biographies of Joan of Arc, and those written by authors aware of the flood of Joan biographies, but who justify their writing yet another biography because all the others seem to have been lacking in some way or another. In all of these cases, the same material is covered, over and over and over again: the Joan biographical sources, after all, are well known, well defined and well organized. What seems to be common with all of these biographies is a strong psychological need on the part of the author to personally relive Joan's life through writing about her. Even if the author has at least done his or her research and is aware of the hundreds of biographies already written, they still feel compelled to write yet another biography. And since she's a rockstar in the pantheon of historical figures, publishers are more than willing to ride the wave of her popularity with yet another book about her. Only a handful of the Joan biographies stand out as having actually contributed new insights and scholarship, an example being Marina Warner's classic study, as well of course the work of Régine Pernoud, the greatest Joan of Arc scholar. I'm giving Castor's work five stars not because it breaks any new ground, but rather because she recasts Joan's life firmly within the backdrop of her historical milieu, indeed much of the book is historical background that is directly related to better understanding Joan's significance. What comes of this is that we learn that Joan, as being a female warrior, is not a coincidence, but rather can be understood in the context of the particular historical moment that engendered her (pun intended). Castor clearly has invested a good deal of effort into writing this book, but it is curious as being yet another example of satisfying this insatiable need of reliving Joan's life through literary writing.

This was my first, but certainly not my last non-fiction title by Ms. Castor. After reading *Joan of Arc: A History* I have moved *She-Wolves: The Women Who Ruled England Before Elizabeth* (a title I have been interested in but until now has sat on the lower levels of reading priority) to my list of books to purchase in the near future. If this author can make the complicated machinations and events of the Hundred Years' War and the brief final years of Joan the Maid's life so easy to follow, a joy to read and yet present such a sensitive portrait of legendary figures - I can't wait to see how she presents the sometimes controversial *She-Wolves* and epic power struggles of English

History. Joan of Arc: A History may surprise some readers who expect to read solely about Joan of Arc (or Joan the Maid and later Saint Joan of Arc), her story is a minor section that makes up the wider world that Ms. Castor paints with articulate and confident strokes of chapters that aim to first educate but also directly accompany the reader through the complex events that played out in England and France during the 14th-15th centuries. The pace of this book is swift and the reader may feel a little intimidated with the huge lists of names and titles and how quickly the many battles, skirmishes, underhanded murders and devastating wars play out on and off the blood soaked fields. It's okay to be confused at this point, but keep with this narrative and trust Ms. Castor as she first explains the basic facts of bad blood shared between kingdoms and moves onto the desperate moments that cry out for a miracle for France and then a familiar young girl who claimed heavenly guidance appears in the pages. Some may expect that Joan's appearance come earlier but the author explains in the front of the narrative why she chose to present this timeline. The rest of this title moves to: detailed descriptions of the battles that Joan the Maid led her fellow french soldiers into, her capture, imprisonment, her trial and death. This narrative could stop there, but continues after the ashes of her memory are scattered and goes on to show the impact that Joan the Maid or "The Maid of Orléans (then later known as Joan of Arc) made in history and shares the words of those who knew and battled beside not just the Maid but the young girl from Domremy who believed in something. Joan of Arc: A History handles certain subjects of injustice, complex topics and controversial questions delicately while at the same time allowing the reader to make their own judgments and conclusions. Those portions I really appreciated and I didn't feel at any time I was being forced into any biased moment by the author. The only negatives I had with this book were, I wished more time was spent on certain details and not on others. I also wanted to know more about Joan's personality traits and a little more about her early history before she arrived at the Armagnac Court and perhaps something about her training to be a soldier (how she trained- that must be recorded somewhere). Still this was an enlightening read that I would recommend to others who have been looking for a widely ranged narrative that can take on: Wars, Battles, Fractured Kingdoms, Court and Religious Conflicts and Saints to create another kind of look at legendary figures that is a joy to read.

_____ * I would like to thank Harper and Edelweiss for the opportunity to read and enjoy
Joan of Arc: A History

Back in high school in the 1950s our senior English class read G.B. Shaw's play "Saint Joan" and

two other books (names now forgotten) focusing on the trial and the religious/theological issues, as I remember the books today. This is not that sort of book. The title, "Joan of Arc: A History," is somewhat misleading. It is actually not a history of Joan per se, but rather of her time, the political (power) struggles of the day, and her place and role therein. The time is pre-nationstate, and if you're not familiar with details of the warring royal families and factions, it's a little easy to get lost from time to time, as I did. The book could have benefited from multiple really good maps. However, putting that aside, for those who are interested in the historical Joan, such as we can know about her, I recommend this book. It's well written and a "relatively" easy read.

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