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Honors HIST 150

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Pernoud, Regine. *Joan of Arc, by Herself and Her Witnesses*. trans. Edward Hyams. Lanham: SCARBOROUGH HOUSE. 1982.

In *Joan of Arc, by Herself and Her Witnesses*, Pernoud used several documents, such as the scripts from the Trial of Condemnation and Trial of Rehabilitation, and recorded quotes to depict the narrative of Joan of Arc’s life and achievements. Using these documents and historical commentary in her book, Pernoud argues how authentic facts are most essential in promoting theories and explaining past events. Furthermore, scholarly discourse is possible once historical facts eliminates people’s ignorance of the subject. Her argument resurfaces throughout the book following the detailed accounts of authentic documents Pernoud gathered.

Legitimate historians portray past events as accurate as possible by relying on concrete evidence and surviving the trials of historical criticism. They are those who can discern truth from false information through cross-referencing other documents and by consulting with experts. Pernoud demonstrated the analysis of several sources to determine the accurate dates where Joan and her escort departed from Vacuoles and arrived in Chinon to meet the with dauphin.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is known how Joan of Arc was Catholic, and many historians who hold different religions, values, and experiences can agree on the accuracy of the events in Joan of Arc’s life by putting historical evidence first.[[2]](#footnote-2) Historians do not ignore proven historical facts, and neither should people in general by placing value in scientific thought.

Historians follow the scientific method to develop working theories and assess existing views of the past. This process involves reworking ideas, discovering new knowledge, obtaining new understandings, and an endless pursuit to determine the greatest amount of ‘truth’ of past events as possible. An example is how the history of “The Maid” or “Maid of Orleans” titles came to exist, and if the titles were given during Joan of Arc’s life or were later appointed to her name after she died.[[3]](#footnote-3).

Pernoud encouraged her readers to find and read the original documents and let the facts speak for themselves.[[4]](#footnote-4) Only segments of the many sources were used in this novel. She argued that the more historical facts one knows, the less ignorant they can be on the subject. Although we can reduce our ignorance of Joan of Arc through study, Pernoud hinted how we must also refrain from choosing to remain ignorant to push inaccurate information, such as false historical documents and inaccurate hypothesizes.

Pernound wrote each chapter with two parts: historical facts of Joan of Arc and an explanation to expand on those facts. Her discussion consisted of clarifying some of the historical evidence presented in the chapter and rebuking other’s claims through providing such evidence. She addressed several theories, such as the Bastard of Orleans theory. This theory, first introduced by Pierre Caze in 1805[[5]](#footnote-5), who wrote a couple articles in 1805 and later in 1819. The theory proposed that Joan is the illegitimate daughter of Louis, Duke of Orleans and Bavaria.[[6]](#footnote-6) Others have repeated the same theory in 1895 but just repeat the original arguments made by Pierre Caze in the beginning of the century.[[7]](#footnote-7) This idea is one of the more believed theories around Joan of Arc, but Pernoud states it is built upon a loose foundation and is easily rebuked.

Pernoud included several pieces of evidence how the Bastard of Orleans Theory ignores the many firsthand accounts of the people in Joan’s childhood village reported during the Trial of Condemnation and Trial of Rehabilitation.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is true that Joan of Arc did not know her own age, but that lack of information should not be the foundation of this false idea.[[9]](#footnote-9) Although it is good to promoted new thought of past events, false and easily disproven beliefs should not be encouraged and shared without concrete evidence.

An argument to Pernoud’s view is how people have the right to challenge and propose ideas. Challenging our current knowledge either reaffirms our knowledge or leads us to abandon it and find more stable truths. The continuation to question and propose ideas are valid, but in an academic setting, arguments must be supported with concrete evidence. The creators of the Bastard Theory, theory where Joan was an agent of Queen of Sicily,[[10]](#footnote-10) and the people who believe that Joan escaped her burning at the stake[[11]](#footnote-11) all had the rights to propose those ideas but should not have without historical documents to support their claims, especially on the beloved hero Joan of Arc. Those theories have little to no evidence to support their claims[[12]](#footnote-12), but unlike the people who announced those theories, authentic historians can easily discern the validity of those claims by remaining academically informed to discern the validity of new ideas.

1. Pernoud, *Joan of Arc, by Herself and Her Witnesses*, trans. Edward Hyams. Lanham: SCAROBOROUGH HOUSE. 1982. p41 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. p276 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. p274 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. p24 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. p25 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Some other theories believe Joan to be the illegitimate child of different nobility. Ibid. p26 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. p28 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid. p27 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid. p43 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. p249 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Pernoud highlighted there were no documents to support the claim that Joan was an agent of the Queen of Sicily. Ibid. p43 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)