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## **“War violence and civil populations. An unpublished record relating to the family of Joan of Arc”**

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So much record has accumulated around Joan of Arc and her trial, it seemed almost impossible that any unpublished documents on this emblematic figure could still be discovered in the 21st century. La Pucelle is one of the best documented historical figures of the medieval period.

However, archival research sometimes leads to unexpected discoveries. An unpublished document concerning the family of Joan of Arc had remained hidden in the darkness of the thick registers of the French Royal Chancery. It is true that the richness of the documents in this collection, which is kept in the French National Archives, has prevented a precise inventory from being made until now. But it would have been necessary to combine this catalogue with a precise knowledge of Joan of Arc's family. The document in question is a letter of pardon in favour of Jean de Vouthon dated January 1449. But no one had paid attention to this letter, lost among so many others, and above all no one had yet identified this “Jean de Vouthon” as a member of Pucelle's family.

It should be pointed out that the Maleyssie collection, amassed over the centuries by the heirs of Joan, was marred by a transcription error which prevented any comparison between the so-called receiver, Jean de Vouthon, and the poor Jean de Vouthon, a common roofer, prosecuted by the justice of Charles VII. We shall see that the position of the person concerned also played a role in confusing the issue. The maze of archives and the investigation that is the job of the historian thus offer surprising archival treasures to those who know how to efficiently cross-reference their sources like a police investigator. It was while conducting my research on Robert de Sarrebück, Lord of Commercy and Lorraine warlord in the service of Charles VII, that I came across Jean de Vouthon, Joan of Arc's maternal uncle. The man, who hailed from Sermaize in Lorraine, was accused of having killed one of the mercenaries in the employ of the Lord of Commercy.

But first, let us return to the context of the 15th century in the confines of the kingdom, and then focus on the character himself, as well as his tragic fate, which reflects the ordeals suffered by the civilian population during the Hundred Years' War.

### **I-War and disorder on the borders of the kingdom of France**

The decade from 1435 to 1444 saw innumerable excesses being perpetrated by employed soldiers, whom some sources refer to as "Écorcheurs". No Distinguishing between friend and ennemy, these warriors plundered and pillaged because they did not receive regular payment for their armed service. They set fires and occasionally raped with almost total impunity. Most of them were soldiers who had served, and still served, under French captains. As the historiographer of the Constable of France, Guillaume Gruel, reports:

'L'an 1439, noz gens d'armes estoient allez vivre en Champagne pour ce qu'ilz n'estoient point poyez. Beauce, Brie, Hainaut, Île-de-France and Champagne were particularly affected by these movements. Gruel continues: "... les gens de monseigneur de Bourbon qui estoient au boys de Viesaine et à Corbail faisoient autant de maulx que les Angloys. Et estoit la pillerie par toute Champagne et Brie et la Beausse en telle maniere que homme n'y povoit mettre remede. Et le roy et tous les seigneurs en son endroit soustenoit ces pilleries..." The reproach is severe without being unjustified. The excesses of the soldiers gave rise to numerous complaints and the king was asked to find a remedy. Charles VII did not yet have the necessary means to stop these oppressions, but he began to legislate in this direction from 1438 onwards, no doubt at the instigation of his constable Arthur de Richemont. Richemont, as constable, was naturally given the task of punishing captains who were guilty of the worst excesses, as well as those committed by their men. He thus delivered Bouzon de Fages, the former bailiff of Montargis, who had been accused of numerous crimes, to the dreaded justice of the provost marshal, who executed him in Troyes at the end of 1438.

However, neither the royal legislation nor this exemplary sentence brought calm to the countryside. The year 1439 was undoubtedly one of the worst years of the Écorcherie, a scourge combined with the famine and plague that were ravaging the kingdom of France. The situation was particularly difficult in the eastern regions of the

kingdom where the population never ceased to deplore the looting and exactions of all kinds associated armed troops. It was at this time that the mercenaries of the Sire de Commercy, Robert de Sarrebrück, crossed the Champagne region on their way back from an expedition on the border of the Duchy of Luxembourg. In 1439, the fortress of Chauvency, which belonged to Robert de Sarrebrück, was heavily besieged by Évrard de la Marck, a formidable warrior who was supported against all odds by the King of France's Constable, Richemont, and who intended to take revenge on Sarrebrück, despite his loyalty to Charles VII. Sides were switched in this game of war, Saarbrück allying itself with the crown's enemies, Vaudémont and Jean de Luxembourg.

Old personal quarrels disrupted the game of traditional alliances. Invoking the label "desobeysants au roy Charles de France" the Constable of France had decided to use armed force against Saarbrück. The Herald Berry reports: "Si assembla ledit seigneur de Commercy des gens ce qu'il en peut finer pour lever le siège de devant sa place de Chavancy ou estoit ledit demyseau Everart ad ce qu'il pouvoit finer de gens avecques partie de ceulx de mondit seigneur le connestable, qui estoient au siege." In order to win the place of Chauvency, the chronicler, Enguerrand de Monstrelet, reports that: "si bailla ledit connestable plusieurs de ses capitaines avec leurs gens audit damoiseau Evrard, qui alerent asseger ladicte ville de Chavensy, environ huit jours après Pasques. Et là firent une grande et forte bastille, où se logerent environ quatorze cens combatans, avec grans nombre des communes, des bonnes villes et du plat pays, qui aloient et venoient."

To face such a coalition, Robert of Sarrebrück reinforced the garrison of the fortress with two hundred men. Two of his lieutenants were charged with coordinating the defence: Inglebert de Dale and Girard de Marescot. According to Monstrelet, the siege lasted four months, during which the damoiseau de Commercy "se tenoit tousjours sur sa garde et bien garny de gens d'armes". There is no indication that the dreaded Sire de Commercy lived there. He did, however, muster his men to rescue the place. As reported by the Hérald Berry, who mentions the flight of the Constable's troops:

"Quant ilz sceurent la venue du seigneur de Commercy, du conte de Vaudesmons et des gens messire Jehan de Lucembourg, qui venoient à l'aide dudit seigneur de Commercy, si se leverent incontinant ; et ainsi perdit ledit de La Marche ses souldoiers qui le planterent [là]. Et s'en vindrent les gens de mondit seigneur le connestable raffraichir en Champaigne ; et les aucuns allerent au siege de Meaulx où estoit allé

mondit seigneur le connetable". After this failure, the Constable and his men did indeed go to the siege of Meaux, where fate was more favourable to them. The mercenaries in the employ of Sire de Commercy also left the place in search of new expeditions.

## **II- Joan of Arc's uncle and the murder of Jean Cornille**

Moving southwards, the armed band that swept through the village of Togny was clearly a remnant of a company that Sarrebrück had engaged. It joined other conflict zones, crossing the Champagne region, perhaps towards the fortress of Châteauvillain. As Jean de Vouthon's letter of remission underlines:

"Plusieurs routiers et gens de guerre venans du siege de Chavency pour le seigneur de Comercy arriverent ou païs de Champaigne, faisant plusieurs maulx, ransonnemens et pilleries oudit Tougny et ailleurs, et pour ce que lesdis compaignons de guerre n'estoient pas lors sur la frontiere des ennemis du roy et ne venoient aucunement de son service, ilz furent habandonnez par nous et par cry publique."

This provision was taken up again by the ordinance of 2 November 1439: "Et en outre le roi abandonne tous capitaines et gens de guerre qui feront contre cette presente loi et ordonnance ; et veut et ordonne que chacun par voye de fait à assemblée de gens et force d'armes leur resiste, et donne le roi à un chacun congé, auctorité et licence de ce faire." The king also authorised anyone to resist these warriors, even by force.

But when the band of soldiers burst into the small village of Champagne, in Togny, no one intervened. It was there that Jean Vouthon sold his labour as a simple wheat thresher after the harvest, perhaps to supplement his income as a roofer? He worked on the land of Jean Jossier, the mayor of a neighbouring village. No doubt the soldiers had taken supplies, and then rested for a few days in one of the village cottages. But they were forced to leave one of their number there, who had fallen ill. The Herald Berry quite rightly describes the deteriorating state of these unpaid soldiers. He gives the example of the troops wandering in Beaujolais at the same time: "les gens d'armes dessusdiz, qui estoient plusieurs malades, à pié et desarméz tellement que se estoit grant hydeur de les veoir".

After terrorising and holding the villagers of Togny to ransom, the gang moved on, leaving a man called Cornille in the house of Jean Jossier, Jean de Vouthon's employer. For ten days, the man tormented the occupants of the house with the story of his bloody misdeeds. On the tenth day, once he had recovered, he asked his host for a horse and a valet to take him to a village called Mesnil, where he thought he would find his fellow soldiers. It was at this precise moment that he asked Jean de Vouthon to accompany him. No one obviously dared to refuse.

The search soon proved useless; Cornille could not find the rest of the gang. The two men walked for days. The poor roofer began to lose patience. After having travelled more than two hundred kilometers, they arrived in Champignelles, at the gates of Burgundy. This was too much! Jean de Vouthon announced that he was stopping here and that he would take the horse back to its owner. Cornille got angry. Voices were raised. Cornille insulted the unfortunate man and scorned the honour of his family by promising to "chevaucher sa mère / (ride (i.e. fuck) his mother".

Then Vouthon, who feared for his life, seized a stick and struck his persecutor on the head. The bribe-taker fell down dead. Jean de Vouthon took off his victim's clothes and hurriedly buried him in a stone quarry. But the soldiers of the Cornille's band, who were prowling around, in turn came upon the roofer and stripped him of his clothes, leaving him only his shirt. The exact circumstances of the discovery of the crime are unknown but Vouthon, suspected of being the culprit, was brought before Vauchelin de La Tour, the royal bailiff of Vitry. The latter threw him in prison to begin his investigation. Jean de Vouthon managed to escape although the details of how that came about are not known. He then resumed his profession, putting the incident behind him: "es prisons dudit lieu desquelles il s'est yssi et party, et a tousjours depuis demeré au pays en vivant de son mestier et labour au mieulx qu'il a peu".

Ten years later, perhaps because Jean Cornille's family had come forward in the meantime, Vouthon was once again arrested by the same provost of Vitry. When questioned, he confessed to his crime. But the accused was claimed as a "homme de corps" (serf) by the Treasury of the Church of Châlons. He was therefore entrusted to the jurisdiction of the Church, to which he was subject. While awaiting a decision on his fate, he was placed in the prisons of the bishop of Châlons. His family and "amis charnels" mobilised to obtain the king's pardon. They argued that the man was an honest worker and that he had a family to support.

Jean de Vouthon, it was explained, had always behaved well. After four trying months of imprisonment, they obtained a royal pardon for Jean. The letter of remission came in January 1449. The episode reveals the links of violence between men of war and civilian population. In particular, it shows the many manifestations of self-defence that individuals resorted to in order to protect themselves or to fight against the excesses of the soldiers during the Hundred Years' War. Like Jean de Vouthon, other peasants fought back and easily obtained a pardon from the king in the name of legitimate defence. Forgiveness was all the easier to grant when the applicant presented himself as a man of good reputation against a perjured and cruel brigand. The pardon was also justifiable insofar as the king used legal means to condemn these excesses even within the ranks of his captains, as many examples show. But this document, which has remained unpublished to this day, that has made it possible to reconstruct the facts of this unfortunate incident, could have been a simple example of the misfortunes of war, if the main protagonist was not Joan of Arc's own uncle.

Indeed, this letter of remission also sheds new light on Joan of Arc's family environment. The document uses the nickname *Jeanssonnet* ("little John"), i.e. the son of John, which is consistent with the fact that his father (Joan's grandfather) bore this name. This Jean de Vouthon is also mentioned by other sources, in particular testimonies. A survey carried out in 1476 with a view to enabling the descendants of La Pucelle to benefit from the ennoblement granted to them by Charles VII (in December 1429) provides elements for comparison. Fourteen people were questioned about Jeanne's family, and all were able to name Jean de Vouthon. Thus the testimony of the carpenter Henry de Vouthon who mentions his grandfather Jean de Vouthon:

"dit et depose en sa loyaulté et conscience qu'il est natif dudit Sermaize, fils de feu Perrinet de Voulthon, lequel Perrinet son pere estoit filz de Jehan de Voulton, lequel se disoit estre frere de Ysabelot, mere de feu Jehanne la Pucelle. Lequel Jehan de Voulton, son grand pere, vint à demourance audit Sermaize du pays de Barrois ou de Lorraine, mesmement d'un village appelé Voulton, distant d'une lieue ou environ d'un autre village nommé Dompremy, scitué et assiz sur la riviere de Meuze".

En 1476, the introductory petition was filed by the descendants of a man named Pierre de Perthes, husband of Mangotte, daughter of Jean de Vouthon, more than forty years after ennoblement was granted. This lapse of time is surprising, especially as the

benefit of this recognition was primarily fiscal. It can probably be explained by the distant nature of the relationship between this cousin and Joan of Arc?

It is necessary here to return to the genealogy of Jeanne. Joan of Arc's mother, Isabelle, who was probably born around 1385-1390, had three brothers – Henri, Mangin and Jean – as well as a sister named Aveline. The boys were named “Vouthon”, which was the village from which the family came and where they retained ties since Isabelle's eldest son, Jacques, settled there as an adult.

Isabelle's father was named Jean de Vouthon. He was mentioned in a register of the legal proceedings of the provostry of Gondrecourt in 1385. Jean de Vouthon and his wife thus gave birth to two daughters and three sons, including Jean who was named after his father and was to be one of Joan of Arc's uncles. As Joan of Arc pointed out at her trial, the women were named after their mothers and the boys after their fathers. Logically, according to Lorraine custom, she should have been named Jeanne Romée.

It is Jean de Vouthon, Joan of Arc's uncle, who interests us here. Cross-checking all the testimonies collected during the 1476 investigation allows us to draw a fairly accurate portrait. Originally from Vouthon, he settled in Sermaize (about 80 kilometers away), in Champagne, with his wife, Marguerite Colnel, and their three children, probably around 1406. He was then a roofer. One event provides us with a precious chronological marker. Jean de Vouthon's daughter, Mangotte had just married a man named Colot Turlot when the latter was killed in 1423 by a bombardment, by "a fire stick", during the siege of the fortified church of Sermaize led by the Count of Salm on behalf of the Duke of Lorraine. The place was then held by La Hire, captain of Vitry. He fortified his position from where he launched raids throughout the duchy of Bar. The young widow was remarried the following year to Pierre de Perthes, whose son, Colin, was at the origin of the 1476 survey.

Some witnesses claimed that Mangotte was born in Sermaize, around 1407, after the couple had settled, but this seems impossible. If Jean de Vouthon had children at a very young age, the indication is that he was born around the year 1385. The letter of remission indicates that the man was 44 years old at the time of the events (in 1439), which would mean he had been born in 1395. This is a gap of about ten years. This inconsistency in the letter of remission is not surprising: it is known that records of age, often indicative, include many variants. Jean de Vouthon was probably ten years older at the time of the events so that he could have had a daughter born around 1407-1408



since she is supposed to have been married in 1423. The other three children of Jean de Vouthon were named Perrinet, Paresson (or Pierresson) and Nicolas. They must have already died by 1476 as none of them was called to testify. However, all the witnesses called during the investigation knew them, the two eldest sons having remained in Sermaize. Henri de Vouthon, one of the grandsons of Jean de Vouthon, said he was 52 years old, which means he had been born in 1424. He was the son of Perrinet de Vouthon.

Henri remembered meeting Jeanne as a child one day when her parents came to visit their family in Domrémy. He was therefore no more than five years old. If he was born around 1424, his father would have been born around 1405, which confirms the date of birth estimated for his grandfather (around 1385). As the letter of remission was issued in 1449, Jean de Vouthon must have been a little over sixty years old. At the time of the 1476 survey, he was obviously dead. Jean Le Montigneue, one of the witnesses, who said he was about seventy years old and had always lived in Sermaize, stated that he had known Jean de Vouthon well. The latter had lived in the village for about thirty years until his death, which occurred shortly after his release, perhaps as a result of the second imprisonment. The families of Vouthon and d'Arc, despite the distance, maintained close relations. Thus we see Jeanne's brothers, who had meanwhile become knights of the Lys, visiting their cousins in Vouthon. Jean du Lys had become provost of Vaucouleurs.

The two brothers, Perrinet and Perreson de Vouthon, were even involved in the episode of the "false Joan of Arc", Claude des Armoises having invited herself to their home, where they made "bonne chere ensemble plusieurs foyes".

Jean de Vouthon's crime occurred between the execution of his niece (1431) and her rehabilitation (1456). This is probably why there is no mention of his relationship with La Pucelle. Jean de Vouthon was judged as "homme de corps" (i.e. of servile condition), whereas he could have benefited from the ennoblement of Joan of Arc's family. No one in his family seems to have understood the extent of this decision for he himself never asked for this recognition, nor did his sons. It was not until one of his grandsons initiated the procedure in 1476, and thanks to this move, that it was possible to find a filiation with La Pucelle. Colin de Perthes, who had started the procedure, argued for a female lineage. But in the mid-16th century, several royal edicts attempted

to prohibit this use by Joan's descendants (for the female lineage). At the same time, the same rules required that the applicants had to "vivre noblement".

This is perhaps what differentiated Colin de Perthes from his uncles and cousins, for the former, who had embraced a military career, was an equerry and a man-at-arms under the king's orders. One of his descendants, Jules-César Le Besgue, was a councillor and advocate of the king at the bailliage and presidial of Vitry. He had his nobility confirmed by the same presidial in 1585. He had married the daughter of a Superintendent of Hunting in the bailliages of Vitry and Châlons.

Jean de Vouthon, on the other hand, remained in servitude. In his time, many inhabitants of the Barrois were still subject to this constraining legal status, which was disappearing in many other regions of the kingdom of France. In contrast, all the families living in the French part of the parish of Domrémy, like the parish of Joan of Arc, was under the jurisdiction of the châtelainie de Vaucouleurs, were free. Those who had been in servitude until then were freed when this territory was attached to the kingdom of France. In the other part of the village, which came under the jurisdiction of the Barrois mouvant and the seigneurie of Bourlemont, a certain number of inhabitants remained in servitude. The confession and list of 1398 gives a precise inventory of the "non-free". The mainmortables or serfs of the seigneurie of Bourlemont thus represented thirty-five families. At the end of the Middle Ages, serfdom was still the last vestige of ancient times in these outlying territories of Lorraine and Champagne.