



## AUTHOR'S NOTE



I discovered the character of Jacquetta when I was working on the history of her daughter, Elizabeth Woodville, who made her extraordinary secret marriage to Edward IV under her mother's supervision. Jacquetta was one of the named witnesses at the wedding, along with the priest, perhaps two others, and a boy to sing the psalms. She then arranged the secret honeymoon nights for the young couple.

Indeed, she may have done more. She was later accused of enchanting the young king into marriage with her daughter; and figures of lead said to represent Edward and Elizabeth, bound together with gold wire, were produced at her trial for witchcraft.

Enough here to intrigue me! I have spent my life as an historian of women, their place in society and their struggle for power. The more I read about Jacquetta, the more she seemed to me to be the sort of character I particularly love: one who is overlooked or denied by the traditional histories, but who can be discovered by piecing together the evidence.

She lived an extraordinary life, and one that is nowhere coherently recorded. In the absence of any biography of Jacquetta, I wrote my own essay and published it with two other historians, David Baldwin writing on Elizabeth Woodville, and Mike Jones writing on Margaret Beaufort in *The Women of the Cousins' War: The Duchess, the Queen, and the King's Mother* (Simon &





## PHILIPPA GREGORY

Schuster, 2011). Readers who want to trace the history behind my novels may be interested in this collection.

Jacquetta married the Duke of Bedford and lived as the first woman of English-ruled France. Her second marriage was for love: she married Sir Richard Woodville, experienced disapproval and had to pay a fine for stepping outside the rules of marriage for royal kinswomen. She served Margaret of Anjou as one of her most favoured ladies in waiting, and was at her side through most of the troubled years of the Wars of the Roses – then known as the Cousins’ War. On the defeat of the Lancastrians at the terrible battle of Towton, her son Anthony and her husband Richard surrendered to the victorious Edward IV. The family would probably have lived quietly at peace under the new York regime, if it had not been for the beauty of their widowed daughter, the passionate nature of the young king, and who knows – the magic of Jacquetta.

The family became kin to the king and Jacquetta took full advantage of her rise, becoming once again the leading lady at the royal court. She lived long enough to endure the murder of her beloved husband and son, to support her daughter through defeat and flight into sanctuary, and to witness her son-in-law’s triumphant return to the throne. For most of her life Jacquetta was at the very centre of the great events. Often she was a player.

Why she has not been studied is a mystery to me. But she belongs to that large population of women whose lives have been ignored by historians in favour of the lives of prominent men. Also this period is relatively neglected compared to – say – more recent times, or even the Tudor period. I expect more historians will work on the fifteenth century, and I hope there will be more research into its women, including Jacquetta.

I suggest that she was inspired by her family legend of Melusina, the water goddess, whose story is beautifully described in Luxembourg Museum as part of the history of the county. To this day the city guides point out the rocks through which Melusina’s bath sank, when her husband broke his promise and





## THE LADY OF THE RIVERS

spied on her. Certainly, the legend of Melusina was used in the art and alchemy of the period, and Jacquetta owned a book that told the story of her goddess ancestor. I think it very important that we as modern readers understand that religion, spiritualism and magic played a central part in the imaginative life of medieval people.

There is a thread running through the historical record associating Jacquetta and even Elizabeth with witchcraft, and I have based some fictional scenes on this. The use of playing cards to predict the future was a medieval practice; we would call the cards 'tarot'. Alchemy was regarded as a spiritual and scientific practice, and Margaret of Anjou licensed alchemists when she was looking for a cure for her husband's illness, which was indeed blamed by some on witchcraft. The practice of herbalism and planting by the phases of the moon was well known in most households, and the rise of anxiety about witchcraft occurs throughout Europe around 1450 onwards. The trial and punishment of Eleanor Cobham is based on the historical records and she was one of the witch-hunt victims.

There follows a bibliography listing the books that I have read for this novel, and readers may also like to visit my website [www.PhilippaGregory.com](http://www.PhilippaGregory.com) for new essays, historical debates, and responses to questions about this and other novels in the series. The next novel will be about the daughters of Richard Neville, the Earl of Warwick, and I am already enjoying the research and excited about writing the story.

