When you live with a project for any length of time, it grows and changes with you. This book is no different, since it began as a dissertation when I was interested in the royal protection of heretics. Since then, my scholarly and personal interests have focused more squarely on preaching, specifically preaching by non-ordained men and women. Generally treated by scholars as a heretical or at least highly suspected activity in the Middle Ages, lay preaching flourished in the 12th-15th centuries. While many lay preachers were condemned, others retained their orthodox standing. It is these orthodox lay preachers who have become the center of my scholarly attention. Lay preachers came from a wide range of social, economic, and educational backgrounds—from adolescent girls to kings. This present study is a first step at mapping out the range of licit lay preaching as it was performed in the middle ages.

Here, I focus on the unusual case of a man who is most certainly the most privileged lay preacher of the Middle Ages, Robert of Anjou, King of Naples. As an anointed monarch, Robert’s status as a lay preacher is exceptional to be sure. But he was never ordained a priest. In addition, the essential lay status of monarchs was stressed by late medieval theologians. Therefore, I consider Robert’s sacred oratory to be a case study in lay preaching, albeit a particularly privileged case. Even within the tradition of royal preachers—and there were a few in Western Europe at the time—Robert enjoyed a special status. As vassal to the pope, as titular head of the Guelf party in Italy, and as a monarch of a wide-ranging kingdom, Robert preached more extensively than other kings of his day. He preached throughout his reign from 1309-1343 on a wide range of occasions which I have categorized as a.) diplomatic and political; b.) academic; c.) religious, including the king’s sojourn at the papal court and his visitations at various religious houses within his kingdom. While I have categorized the occasions at which he spoke, I have not categorized his sermons, per se, since there is a consistency in form, tone, and content that is central to understanding his performance as a preacher. Preaching allowed Robert to claim for himself a position not limited by tradition or social expectation. Through ritual speech, Robert crafted a singular royal office.

Portions of this study have appeared previously in different forms. An early overview of the subject of Robert’s preaching appeared in
FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1994. This present study still resembles that early work in the basic categorization of preaching occasions, but most of my interpretations have developed since then. Portions of Chapter Four on Robert at the university have appeared as separate studies that focus on Neapolitan universities as branches of royal government. And a section of Chapter Six which explores the imagery of a spiritual and temporal team featuring Francis-Clare and Robert-Sancia appeared in 1996.

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exist in this study I warmly share with those mentioned here and in the notes.

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