

Robert of Anjou (1309–1343)

Subjects: Art

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Robert of Anjou King of Sicily (1309–1343). Robert of Anjou was the third king of the Angevin dynasty on the throne of Sicily. He ruled from 1309 to 1343, but, in these years, Sicily was under the domain of the Aragonese dynasty and, hence, his authority was limited to the continental land of the Kingdom and his court was mainly focused in the city of Naples. From an iconographic point of view, he is particularly interesting because, between his official representations (namely, commissioned directly by him or his entourage), he was the first king of Sicily who made use not only of stereotyped images of himself, but also of physiognomic portraits. In particular, this entry focuses on these latter items, comprising the following four artworks: Simone Martini's altarpiece, the Master of Giovanni Barrile's panel, the Master of the Franciscan tempera's canvas, and the so-called Lello da Orvieto's fresco.

Keywords: royal images ; royal iconography ; kings of Sicily ; kings of Naples ; Angevin dynasty ; Robert of Anjou

Robert of Anjou was the third exponent of the Angevin dynasty on the throne of Sicily. He was crowned on 3 August 1309, and he ruled until his death on 20 January 1343. In reality, in these years, Sicily was under the domain of the Aragonese dynasty and, hence, his authority was limited to the continental land of the Kingdom and his court was mainly focused in the city of Naples. He also held the title of King of Jerusalem and Count of Provence, Forcalquier, and Piedmont and, during some periods, he was also proclaimed Lord of some cities of central and northern Italy, as well as Senator of Rome and Papal Vicar in the Italian territories of the Empire (in general, regarding Robert of Anjou, see ^[1] and, in more synthesis, ^[2], ^[3] (pp. 183–249), and ^[4]). Among his contemporaries, Robert had a reputation as an intellectual and he was frequently celebrated for his erudition and wisdom (he was often compared to the biblical Solomon; see ^[5]), as well as for his marked religiosity (he was himself author of numerous sermons and two theological treatises; see ^[6]). In particular, the Angevin was an active patron in both the scientific-literary and artistic fields, and, exactly in this last sector, historians have highlighted an intense activity in the commission of his own portraits for political and propagandistic purposes (in this regard, see lastly, but with references to the previous bibliography, ^[7]^[8]. On Robert of Anjou's portraits, we also point out ^[9]. Instead, regarding the propagandistic activity of Robert of Anjou in general, ^[10] is worthy of reporting).

From an iconographic point of view, Robert of Anjou is particularly interesting because he was the first king of Sicily who made use, between his official representations (namely, commissioned directly by him or his entourage), not only of stereotyped images of himself, but also of physiognomic portraits. In the first group are representations connected with public employments and representing Robert in his institutional role of King (indeed, he is depicted while seated on a throne bearing a crown, sceptre, and globe). They are the royal images on bulls and seals; the representations of the monarch on the coins minted in the Kingdom of Sicily, in central and northern Italy, and in Provence; and the statue sculpted by Tino da Camaino in approximately 1325 for the sarcophagus of Mary of Hungary in the presbytery of the Church of Santa Maria Donnaregina in Naples (despite this image being placed in a religious context and having limited visibility, it represented Robert in his institutional role and, indeed, he had been carved in majesty).

In the second group, instead, are representations connected with religious and devotional contexts and associated, so to speak, with the private sphere and the personal practices of Robert. They represent the Angevin as a devotee (face in profile, kneeling position, small size, and proximity to religious subjects) while he carries out liturgical activities and devotional acts. What is more, they render, following the report on the bones of the King by the Istituto di Anatomia Umana Normale dell'Università di Napoli in June 1959 (see ^[11] (pp. 40–42)), his real physical features: light brown hair that falls straight down to the neck and concludes with a rather tight curl; shaved, thin, and oblong face; protruding and pointed chin; accentuated jaw; thin lips; pronounced nose; narrow eyes that, as well as the cheeks, are rather sunken and that highlight the cheekbones; high and spacious forehead; and deep wrinkles around the nose and mouth (**Figure 1**). This entry focuses on this second group of images. In particular, they are the following four artworks: Simone Martini's altarpiece, the Master of Giovanni Barrile's panel, the Master of the Franciscan tempera's canvas, and the so-called Lello da Orvieto's fresco (regarding the identification of Robert of Anjou's official image, see ^[12] (pp. 97–110), with more information and bibliographic references).



Figure 1. Simone Martini, *Saint Louis of Toulouse crowning King Robert of Anjou*, painting on wood, 1317–1319. Naples, Museo di Capodimonte. Detail of Robert's face. Source: public domain image.

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