What follows concerns a group of medieval Catalan historians in the eighteenth century and in particular Jaume Caresmar (1717–1791), a canon of the western Catalan convent of Bellpuig de les Avellanes. Notwithstanding this focused, not to say narrow, scope, the book has taken me decades of intermittent work. It is unlikely that I would have brought it to completion without the prolonged isolation imposed by the COVID-19 epidemic. I acknowledge my good fortune not to have suffered to the degree that so many others did during this terrible period.

I am not a fast or prolific writer, but usually I am able to wrap up specific tasks within a reasonable amount of time. This, however, has taken me more years than any other scholarly enterprise. Hence there are so many people who have helped me that to recognize everyone specifically would amount to an autobiography. My few words here are not sufficient to represent the range and extent of my gratitude.

For a long while I regarded this undertaking’s petty complexities as an intellectual companion more than as a project. This is partly because the book reflects my interests in and experiences with the survival and destruction of documentation from the Middle Ages but also with the evolution of what was originally a response to a fortuitous circumstance and its unraveling complications. While Caresmar and the Bellpuig circle are familiar to anyone studying the sources for Catalan medieval history, the discovery in 2002 of an immense cartulary and other records of medieval history hidden in 1835 and subsequently forgotten initiated my research.

I want in the first place to acknowledge the help, friendship, and support of Professor Flocel Sabaté, who informed me about the newly found documentation, facilitated my access to it, and collaborated with me in putting together information about Caresmar’s surviving work. He has made this book possible.

Dr. Robert Porta, the archivist for the Marist library and archive at Bellpuig de les Avellanes, has been extremely kind in facilitating in every way my access to Caresmar’s manuscripts preserved there and materials for the history of the monastery. He has also given me assistance with the images of Bellpuig...
for this book. My time spent at the Marist foundation, lodged at the lovely hotel that occupies part of the monastery, has been spiritually enhancing and historically evocative, even inspirational. I am thankful for the kindness of everyone at Bellpuig de les Avellanes.

Much to my regret, I never met Father Eduardo Corredera, a member of the Marist community who, beginning in the 1950s, wrote extensively on Caresmar and the Bellpuig circle of historians. Insofar as I have accomplished anything, it is on the basis of Father Corredera’s indefatigable efforts, as diligent as Caresmar, his exemplar and subject, and more quietly patient.

Francesc Fité, a professor of art history at the University of Lleida, shared with me his unique knowledge of the history of Àger, both its monastery and town, and about the archival holdings and artistic remains of western Catalonia. Montserrat Pagès i Paretas, another eminent art historian, has translated much of what I have composed for conference presentations and articles into Catalan and over many years she and her husband, the distinguished philologist Josep Moran i Ocerinjauregui, have been devoted friends of mine.

Because of the scattering of what remains of Caresmar’s work and that of the other Bellpuig historians, I have sought the assistance of many archivists and librarians. I would like to recognize especially Dra. Araceli Rosillo, director of the Franciscan archives for Catalonia in Barcelona, and Anna Gudayol Torelló at the archives section of the Biblioteca de Catalunya, also in Barcelona.

While only a small amount of Caresmar’s work is directly related to the ecclesiastical archive of Vic, I cannot neglect to mention my longstanding debt of gratitude to several people associated with the cathedral: Father Miquel Gros i Pujol, the archivist whose ninetieth birthday is this year 2023; Dr. Rafel Ginebra, who knows more about the vast collection than anyone else; and Dr. Ramon Ordeig i Mata, who has organized, edited, and synthesized so many archival records of the Catalan Middle Ages as to equal or surpass the examples set by the great names of the past, not simply Caresmar or Jaume Pasqual for Catalonia, but great European historians such as Baluze, Deslisle, or Kehr.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the enthusiasm and support of Cornell University Press, its editorial director, Mahinder S. Kingra, and the editors of this series, Professors M. Cecilia Gaposchkin of Dartmouth and Anne E. Lester of Johns Hopkins. Their kind encouragement has meant more to me than these two sentences convey. Ange Romeo-Hall supervised the editorial process, and I also thank Kristen Ashley Gregg and her colleagues in marketing at Cornell University Press for their kind help and enthusiasm. Dina Dineva composed the index, not a completely thankless task, but certainly a difficult and admirable one. I am grateful to Professor Jordi Bolos i Masclans of the University of Lleida for drawing the maps.
I have many different kinds of obligation to my Yale colleague Professor Hussein Fancy, not the least of which is bringing my work to the attention of the series editors. Professor Maureen Miller at Berkeley read an early version of the manuscript and gave me very helpful suggestions. I profited from the advice of Professor Roser Salicrú i Lluch at the University of Barcelona. My former student Dr. Annalena Müller, an expert on early-modern monasticism, not only read and commented on the text but did so more quickly than I would have thought possible. I discussed aspects of this research with two distinguished, beloved, and recently deceased English medievalist colleagues, J. N. Hillgarth and Peter Linehan. Anne Lester invited me to present my work on Jaume Caresmar to the History Department Seminar at Johns Hopkins University. I benefited greatly from the comments of participants and want particularly to thank John Marshall for his extremely helpful suggestions.

Research over many years was made possible by grants from Yale University, especially the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies and the Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies.

I enlisted and benefited from the patient and meticulous copyediting of my current and former students Grant Halliday, Spencer Weinreich, and Sylvan Lebrun. Agnieszka Rec, a former undergraduate and graduate student now with the Beinecke Library, has edited much of what I have published, always with a uniquely attentive eye for consistency and ear for the sense (or nonsense) of the words. My official copyeditor, Liz Schueler, showed me, among other things, how many mistakes lurk in what I complacently assumed was a pretty well-turned out manuscript. Mary Ribesky at Westchester Publishing Services saw the manuscript through production. The dutiful statement that errors are all my own is even more than usually apt and necessary.

Because of the length of time elapsed since I started on this book, the specific instances of aid and reinforcement merge into consideration of my career and my dependence on many forms of companionship and inspiration. In dedicating this book to Teófilo Ruiz and Scarlett Freund I express, inadequately but intensely, my pleasure in their company and the benefit I have received from their knowledge and friendship.