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KONFERENSER IIO

# BIRGITTINE CIRCLES









# Birgittine Circles

PEOPLE AND SAINTS IN THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

*Elin Andersson, Ingela Hedström & Mia Åkestam (eds)*



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#### ABSTRACT

This book contains the proceedings from the Fourth International Birgitta Conference, held in August 2021 in Stockholm and Vadstena. The theme for the conference, Birgittine Circles, focuses on Birgittine networks and the importance of individuals, places, and objects associated with the Birgittine Order. The concept of circles also applies to ideas, physical objects, travels, and exchange between different orders. The ten contributions collected in the present volume range from Birgitta's influence on late medieval culture in England, the spread of the Birgittine Order around the Baltic Sea and its importance in places as widely separated as Norrland and Spain, predecessors and successors such as Margery Kempe, and Birgittine spirituality linked to objects and texts.

#### KEYWORDS

Saint Birgitta, Vadstena Abbey, the Birgittine Order, medieval history, medieval literature, medieval manuscripts, medieval art, monasticism, theology, nuns, liturgy, church art, textual networks

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# Preface

In 2007, an initiative was taken for a new type of interdisciplinary, international symposia, aimed at bringing forward new perspectives in the humanities in Swedish medieval studies in general, and new research regarding St Birgitta, the Birgittine Order, and the Birgittine world in particular. The initiative was taken by the Centre for Medieval Studies (Stockholm University), the Birgitta Foundation (Birgittastiftelsen) and the Swedish National Archives.<sup>1</sup> This book is the result of the fourth symposium with such a focus: *Birgittine Circles. People and Saints in the Medieval World*.

2020 marked the 100th anniversary of Birgittastiftelsen, which was founded in order to care for the cultural heritage of Vadstena as well as to promote knowledge of Birgitta and Birgittine research. In connection to the celebration of the anniversary, the organizers wanted to draw attention to today's interdisciplinary research on Birgitta and the Birgittine Order by arranging the international symposium *Birgittine Circles. People and Saints in the Medieval World*. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic forced us to postpone the event, but in August 2021 scholars from different academic disciplines and many different countries presented and discussed current research within the field, both online and in person in Stockholm and Vadstena.

The arrangement was hosted by the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities (Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien) in Stockholm and the Birgitta Foundation in Vadstena, and generously sponsored by the Granholm Foundation (Granholms stiftelse), Stockholm University, the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities, the Letterstedt Society (Letterstedtska

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1 The previous three symposia have been published as anthologies in KVHAA's conference series: *Saint Birgitta, Syon and Vadstena* (2010), *The Birgittine Experience* (2013), and *Continuity and Change* (2017).

föreningen), and the Längman Culture Foundation (Stiftelsen Längmanska kulturfonden).

The theme of the conference, *Birgittine Circles*, focused on Birgittine networks and the importance of individuals, places, and objects associated with the Birgittine Order: people connected to Birgitta, her daughter Katarina, Mathias of Linköping, and the figures cultivated by the Birgittines as potential saints; predecessors and followers of Saint Birgitta in the mystic tradition; and those adhering to theories of medieval “networking” within or attached to the Birgittine movement. The concept of circles could also apply to ideas, physical objects, travels, and exchange between different orders. In recent years, materiality research—expressed as the “material turn”—has made it possible to study and emphasize the social significance and value of objects. In contrast, the “biographical turn” emphasizes the importance of individuals and interacting individuals within social networks.

With people, saints, and circles in focus, the theme of this conference joined the current fields of network theory, biographical research, and research investigating the agency of people and objects. Special emphasis was placed on the analysis of the material sources available in Vadstena: the monastery area itself with church and convent buildings, liturgical vessels and textiles, sculptures, altar cabinets, etc., turning attention to concepts such as spatiality and place.

The contributions ranged from Birgitta’s influence on late medieval culture in England, the spread of the Birgittine Order around the Baltic Sea and its importance in places as widely separated as Norrland and Spain, predecessors and successors such as Margery Kempe, and Birgittine spirituality linked to objects and texts. Ten of the conference papers are included in this volume.

The keynote speaker Laura Saetveit Miles (Bergen) asks how can we measure “influence” in the past? Why focus on female authors? What is an “author” in the Middle Ages and how does this term apply to visionaries like Birgitta? To explore these issues, her article ‘Birgittine Borrowings in the Middle English Devotional Compilation *Meditaciones domini nostri*’ focuses on how Birgitta’s *Revelationes* and related texts were interpolated into Middle English devotional compilations.

On the English theme, Ann M. Hutchison (Toronto) writes on ‘Syon Abbey’s First Professions in 1420: Rites and Participants’, where she shows how a network, a close community, helped to launch the new foundation, and to lead the king’s vision of religious reform.

Einat Klafter (Tel Aviv) explores the theme of the reception of Birgitta and her *Revelationes* in the article ‘Kempe’s Roman Holiday: Elevating Poverty as a Form of *Imitatio Birgittae*’. This paper explores how Kempe’s unusual pilgrimage experience stems from her attachment to the figure of the Swedish holy woman, her main role model

for sanctity. Kempe maps out a personal experience of Rome, a unique female-oriented pilgrimage circuit in the Eternal City.

David Carrillo-Rangel (Bergen) turns the attention to “Birgitta reception” in the Iberian Peninsular Kingdoms in the article ‘Performing Heavenly Delights in Medieval Barcelona: Circulation of Birgittine Texts and Affective Communities’, with a discussion of previously overlooked source material and a mapping of medieval Barcelona.

In the article by Anna-Stina Häggglund (Turku) the focus shifts to the Baltic Sea region. Her paper ‘Birgittine Circles in the Baltic Sea Region: Intercessory Prayers and Gifts of Friendship’ shows that differences in the benefactor communities are distinguished through the socioeconomic background and the location of the monasteries, depending on whether they were located in rural areas or near large towns.

Roger Andersson (Stockholm) presents a previously unknown text in Old Swedish that contributes to the understanding of indulgence practices in Vadstena in his article ‘A Newly Discovered Old Swedish Sermon on Indulgences at Vadstena.’ The text is published in full, with an English translation.

Katarina Hallqvist (Lund) continues the Vadstena theme in ‘Growing for Paradise: Birgittine Guidance for the Mind’s Eye in some *Ad Vincula* Sermons’. The article seeks to explore and exemplify how the Vadstena preachers skillfully used their tools of knowledge to combine real images—or people’s memory of them—with a simultaneous promoting of an ability to look beyond, by using words only.

Karin Lagergren (Växjö) offers a new understanding of authorship and the processes leading up to the Birgittine sisters’ divine liturgy. She points out ongoing discussions in the community, with collective efforts and teamwork in ‘Birgittine Liturgical Music—Teamwork or the Product of a Single Genius? A New Hypothesis for an Old Question’.

Eva Lindqvist Sandgren (Uppsala) discusses how Vadstena’s art and architecture connected to the general Catholic Church, and also introduced innovative features and thus emphasized the cult of the Virgin Mary in ‘The Organization of the Birgittine Abbey Church at Vadstena: An Innovative Recycling of Established Concepts’.

In the concluding article, ‘Birgittines in Norrland: Agents of Church Reform and Sámi Conversion’, Biörn Tjällén (Sundsvall) discusses Birgittine agency in the push to integrate northern Scandinavia into the Christianity of the Latin Church. The contribution re-examines the source material and includes new sources that have not been featured in the previous critical discussion. Tjällén’s article provides the impetus to address a lacuna in Birgittine research, to widen the field and to inspire further research.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to everyone who contributed to the conference and to the publication of this volume. We are grateful to Alan Shima

(Uppsala) for thoroughly checking the English. Last, but not least, we would like to express our gratitude to the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities for accepting this volume into their conference series.

Stockholm, November 2022

Elin Andersson

Ingela Hedström

Mia Åkestam

# Birgittine Borrowings in the Middle English Devotional Compilation *Meditaciones domini nostri*\*

Could Birgitta of Sweden have been the most influential female author of late medieval England? She was well known through her *Revelationes* and Syon Abbey, the sole English house of her Order, but what was the full extent of her impact on English culture? How was her authority as an author and visionary shaped by English literary agents? Scholars have approached these huge, complex questions from different directions for some time now, but much work still remains to be done.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter I will explore one crucial, yet neglected, piece of evidence for evaluating Birgitta's influence in England: a Middle English devotional compilation with extensive borrowings from Birgittine texts, an emphasis on Birgitta's visionary authority, and a remarkable focus on the power of the Virgin Mary.

Known as the *Meditaciones domini nostri*, or *The Lyf of Oure Lord and the Virgyn Mary*, this early 15th-century prose gospel meditation relays the story of the life of Christ and his mother Mary for the purpose of devotional reading.<sup>2</sup> As a compilation,

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\* Research for this article was made possible by a Young Research Talents grant from the Research Council of Norway, and a Bodleian Library Sassoon Visiting Fellowship in the Special Collections and a Jesus College Short-Term Visiting Fellowship, both at the University of Oxford.

1 For example, Ellis 1982; Johnston 1985; Hutchison 1999; Pezzini 2008.

2 The Latin title is taken from the incipit to the short Latin prologue whereas the English title is taken from the first line. The most extensive discussion of the text remains the introduction to the edition, an unpublished 1992 PhD dissertation by E. Blom-Smith, followed by Miles 2017, 2020a, pp. 195–199. Elizabeth Salter includes this life of Christ in her work on *Love's Mirror* and other translations of the *Meditationes vitae Christi* (*MVC*), where she grouped it with the *Speculum Devotorum*, a similar text; see Salter 1974, chapter IV, esp. 106, n. 188. Roger Ellis and Barry Windeatt both mention it in passing as part of their discussions of Birgitta's revelations in medieval England; see Ellis 1982, p. 180; Windeatt 2011, p. 199. For more on English pseudo-Bonaventuran lives of Christ, see Sargent 1984; Johnson 2013; Johnson & Westphall 2013.

it weaves together scripture with other sources to create a vivid, detailed narrative in the tradition of the widespread pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes vitae Christi*. Compilations, both Latin and vernacular, map what texts were circulating at different times in different textual circles by showing how one particular compiler chose to integrate the sources into a new whole.<sup>3</sup> In England a rich tradition of vernacular devotional compilations emerged in the Late Middle Ages. These texts brought to a wide range of readers an equally wide range of sources woven together to promote spiritual life and meditational practice through reading.

Birgitta's *Revelationes* and other Birgittine texts proved to be fairly popular in the wave of Middle English compilations produced in largely monastic circles throughout the late 14th to the early 16th centuries. Visions containing prophecies, judgements, guidance on spiritual life, or details about Christ and the holy family were of most interest to compilers. Compilations survive as an important genre in the puzzle of precisely what Birgitta meant to late medieval English readers—especially since many more copies of these works survive than of English-origin *Revelationes*. The major compilations with Birgittine borrowings—*Chastising of God's Children*, *Pore Caitiff*, *Mirror to Devout People* (*Speculum devotorum*), *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, and *Meditaciones domini nostri* (my focus here), among others—total at least 140 manuscripts and early printed copies. In sum I would surmise that the compilation genre was, based on surviving copies, by far the largest written source of Birgittine influence in medieval England.<sup>4</sup>

But what kind of influence(s) did those compilations spread? How did these texts shape the figure of Birgitta for English audiences? These of course are the much more interesting questions behind the sheer numbers. Indeed, each of these compilations shapes a different version of Birgitta as it borrows from her visions to different ends, sometimes with acknowledgment, sometimes silently; sometimes closely, sometimes deeply reworked; sometimes at length and sometimes briefly. *Meditaciones domini nostri* stands out as the compilation with the largest total amount of material borrowed from Birgittine sources, in this case the *Revelationes* and *Sermo Angelicus*. It explicitly acknowledges Birgitta as the visionary source the most times of any devotional compilation—and further contains a host of citations that are included silently. Finally, it offers the most Marian-centric emphasis of any of the comparable compilations, as I will discuss below.

This essay explores in depth, for the first time, the nature of these Birgittine borrowings in *Meditaciones domini nostri* and what role they play in the text overall. Not

3 For more on late medieval devotional compilations in England, see Cré *et al.* 2020.

4 Ellis 1982 remains the most useful general overview of these compilatory uses.

much is known about this text so I hope my conclusions can be the basis for further research into other aspects that I do not have the scope to pursue at length here. What I detail below is how various compilatory strategies produce a text that supports and promotes the role of women in mediating access to the divine and in leading religious communities. Birgitta's visions allow an emphasis on Birgitta and the Virgin Mary as holy women—women who channelled Christ, whether through their body/womb, or through visions. This emphasis is more pronounced here than in *Mirror to Devout People*, a significant compilation that explicitly relies on the visionary writings of “approved women”, Birgitta, Mechtild of Hackeborn, and Catherine of Siena.<sup>5</sup> Unusually, the *Meditaciones* promotes Mary and Birgitta as independent, assertive, authoritative figures, with no moderation or apologies. Both the manuscript page and the text demonstrate this on every level. Birgitta's authority is not explicitly discussed, as in the *Mirror to Devout People*, but rather taken as a given, as she is cited as an authoritative source in the same way as male sources. The borrowings strategically elevate Mary's position in the biblical narrative in a way that validates women's power among and over men. The *Meditaciones*, particularly by means of its Birgittine borrowings, centres an otherwise marginal version of Mary's life that grants her an authoritative voice both over her own representation as well as over the history of the early church community. This compilation offers a vital insight into how Birgitta, and holy women in general, were perceived in late medieval England.

#### MANUSCRIPT WITNESSES AND TEXTUAL COMPOSITION

One important factor in understanding how this unusual representation of powerful women might have been received by readers lies in its restricted circulation: *Meditaciones* survives in only two manuscripts, far fewer than most of the other compilations with Birgittine borrowings. Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Bodley 578 is a small volume containing 50 paper leaves with only this text, written in a clear Anglicana. The Bodley manuscript likely dates from the first half of the 15th century; otherwise, we know nothing of its medieval provenance, and few traces of medieval readership remain.<sup>6</sup> Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.15.42 also dates from the early to mid-15th century, and also written in Anglicana by one scribe. Its 110 parchment pages contain an assortment of eleven different Middle English and Latin religious works including some shorter catechetical pieces, Richard Rolle's *The Commandment*, the

5 Gillespie 2006; Patterson 2016a; 2016b.

6 For a more extensive description see Blom-Smith 1992, pp. liv–lxiii. See also the catalogue entry in Hunt & Madan 1895–1953, vol. 5, pp. 326–327.

*Meditaciones*, *Contemplations on the Dread and Love of God*, and the purgatory visions of the Monk of Eynsham and Tnugdál. This “core” of longer texts, as I have argued elsewhere, “consistently draws attention to the interconnectedness of body, contemplation, and vision, and the necessity of their juxtaposition for moral living and salvation”.<sup>7</sup> The Trinity manuscript, in contrast to Bodley, shows signs of several medieval engagements, with at least two or three hands distinguishable in marginal annotations. Its provenance is also unknown but the contents and the 1468 ownership inscription by a “frater” William Caston suggests a monastic use.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the manuscript witnesses do not leave us very much concrete information regarding the identity of the compiler, his intended audience, or the actual audience of these particular surviving copies. Unlike the compiler of the *Mirror to Devout People*, who explicitly identifies his audience as the nuns at Syon Abbey, the only Birgittine house in medieval England, and directly addresses his “sister” as the reader throughout the text, the *Meditaciones* leaves no explicit hint of its hoped-for readership in the text itself. However, the *Meditaciones* compiler leaves some clues: that he felt his readers needed even short bits of Latin translated; that Birgitta was an appropriate source to cite frequently and unreservedly; and that his readers would have a special interest in Mary. These clues suggest an intended readership not unlike that of the *Mirror to Devout People*: devout female readers, perhaps enclosed like the Syon sisters.

While *Meditaciones* is fairly typical for the genre of gospel meditation or life of Christ in its overall structure—Mary’s genealogy; Christ’s birth, life, death, and resurrection; the Ascension and Pentecost—it adds both an unusually detailed account of the Annunciation and an unusually detailed account of Mary’s life after her son’s final departure, with concluding chapters on her spiritual powers in general. The compiler or relevant scribes connected *Meditaciones* to the pseudo-Bonaventuran tradition: a Latin prologue found only in Bodley derives closely from the last section of the prologue to the *Meditationes vitae Christi*, and the same scribe also concludes the main text by noting that “here end the meditations about the life and passion and resurrection and ascension into heaven of Jesus Christ according to Bonaventure out of his third, and shortest, though best edition” (171/6–11).<sup>9</sup> This somewhat academic comment identifies an authorizing source in the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes*

7 Miles 2020b, p. 364.

8 For a detailed discussion of this manuscript, see Miles 2020b. The James Catalogue is available online at <https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/Manuscript/B.15.42>, with a link to a scan of the entire manuscript.

9 All citations from *Meditaciones* are from Blom-Smith 1992, by page and line numbers. All translations from Middle English are my own. Translation here from the textual note on p. 245. For the prologue, Blom-Smith 1992, Appendix pp. 308–310.



*vitalis Christi*, one of the most widely read lives of Christ in medieval Europe, and well known in England by this time due to Nicholas Love's English translation, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, from around 1410. However, less than half of the *Meditaciones* text is actually from the *Meditationes vitalis Christi*; rather, many other sources are woven into the *Meditaciones* by the compiler. Typical for vernacular lives of Christ, the *Meditaciones* incorporates Bible verses translated directly from the Vulgate and accompanied by careful explication, some apocryphal gospels, various patristic sources such as Jerome, excerpts from Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons, and small parts of Nicholas of Lyra's *Postilla*. In addition, the compiler drew from the *Legenda Aurea*, *The Pricking of Love*, Mandeville's *Travels*, once from Elizabeth of Hungary's *Revelations*, and a long borrowing from *Of Three Workings in Man's Soul*, a meditation-treatise on the Annunciation very likely by Richard Rolle, which I have discussed elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> However, the most prominent of all the sources cited in *Meditaciones* are Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelaciones* and *Sermo Angelicus*.

At least 25 distinct interpolations can be identified from Birgitta's *Revelaciones* or the *Sermo Angelicus*, for a total of approximately 12% of the text (see Appendix for a chart of borrowings).<sup>11</sup> In almost half of these borrowings (12 out of 25), Birgitta as visionary is identified as the source within the text itself, preserved identically by both

10 On the Rollean borrowing, see Miles 2017; 2020a, pp. 195–199. Blom-Smith 1992 discusses all the sources at length, pp. vi–xxiv (though she does not identify *Of Three Workings*). This list could also possibly include another female visionary source for a curious, unattributed passage immediately before the *Of Three Workings* interpolation: “the angell Gabriell apperid to hure to salute hyre [Mary at the Annunciation], and as scho schewid by the reuelacion vnto a deuote seruante of hure: in the tyme that the angell come to grete hure [Mary] schoo was clothid in a kurtyll of blacke gyrd aboute with a small gerdull and barefote and thereto nothyng on her hede, but oonly a bende that kepte hure here vp from hure yen and fro hur visage” [“the angel Gabriel appeared to her to salute her, and as she showed by the revelation to a devout servant of her: at the time that the angel came to greet her she was clothed in a kirtle of black girdled about with a small girdle and barefoot and nothing on her head, but only a band that kept her hair up from her eyes and from her face”] (13/6–13). Blom-Smith is not able to make a positive identification in her edition, and I have not yet been able to find its source either.

11 I have followed Blom-Smith's identifications of Birgittine borrowings as in her explanatory notes, with some corrections; possibly other borrowings remain to be noticed (Blom-Smith 1992). In Blom-Smith's edition, the text covers about 4,262 lines (170 pages x 25 lines per page), of which approximately 515 lines are Birgittine borrowings so far identified, that is, approximately 12%. Distinguishing what constitutes “distinct” is somewhat tricky since borrowings are sometimes only separated by a sentence or two of other material. I have counted any uninterrupted, cohesive passage as a distinct borrowing. Identifying the closest surviving Latin or vernacular source copies or compilations of the Birgittine texts remains outside the scope of this chapter.

manuscripts—that is to say, by the compiler himself almost certainly and not a later copyist. For instance, a typical borrowing from the *Revelationes* opens thus: “In the boke of revelacions of Seynt Brigitte we fynde that oure lady seide to hure these wordis that folowith ...” [“In the book of Revelations of Saint Birgitta we find that Our Lady said to her these words that follow ...”] (63/2) and for a borrowing from the *Sermo* (which is never referred to by name but always as part of the *Revelationes*), “As we rede that an angell seide to Seynt Brigitte, as we fynde in her reuelacions these wordes that folowen ...” [“As we read that an angel said to Saint Birgitta, as we find in her Revelations these words that follow ...”] (155/11). Slightly more than half of the time (16 out of 25) the borrowings are unacknowledged and interpolated without any recognition of their source. It is difficult to discern a logic to the integrated citation or lack thereof.

Not only the text itself, but also both manuscripts emphasize Birgitta’s authority as a source. In Trinity, the main scribe calls out four of the Birgittine borrowings with rubricated marginal notations of “Birgitta” (fols. 5r, 5v, 25r, 31r), whereas no other sources are written in red more than once. On fol. 5v, there is no in-text identification of Birgitta, so the scribe must either have been copying an exemplar annotation or had independently identified her vision and thought it important enough to rubricate “In revelacione sancte brigitte” (Fig. 1). The main scribe identifies another borrowing with “Birgitta” in black ink in the margin on fol. 13v. Two other annotators draw attention to Birgittine passages with marginal notations in Trinity: on fol. 21v, “Birgitta” in black; and fol. 42v, between columns, “in revelacionibus Sancte Birtgytte” in a different hand, also in black (Fig. 2).<sup>12</sup> (This unusual spelling “Birtgytte” is not found elsewhere in the work.) In total, seven marginal annotations in the Trinity copy establish Birgitta as its most visible textual authority among all the sources. Additionally, two of the other five rubricated marginal source annotations draw attention to women’s visionary and contemplation power: “nota de reuelacionibus elizabeth” (Elizabeth of Hungary), fol. 6r, marks a passage drawn from Elizabeth’s *Revelations* concerning Mary’s ascent of the temple steps as a young girl; and “Ricardus de sancto Victore” (Richard of St Victor), fol. 8r, marks the borrowing from *Of Three Workings* that describes Mary as an expert contemplative.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the majority of marginal attributions support the authority of passages concerned with elevating Mary’s authority or the authority of the medieval visionary women who supplied new material on her life.

12 Blom-Smith (1992) identifies these two annotations as the same hand, but several letter forms differ, as well as the spelling of the saint’s name.

13 See further discussion, Miles 2020a, pp. 196–197. Other marginal attributions are “Bartholomeus” (fol. 15v), and partially indecipherable, “Barbar [...]” (98/5) and “Egla[n [...]” (fol. 26r).

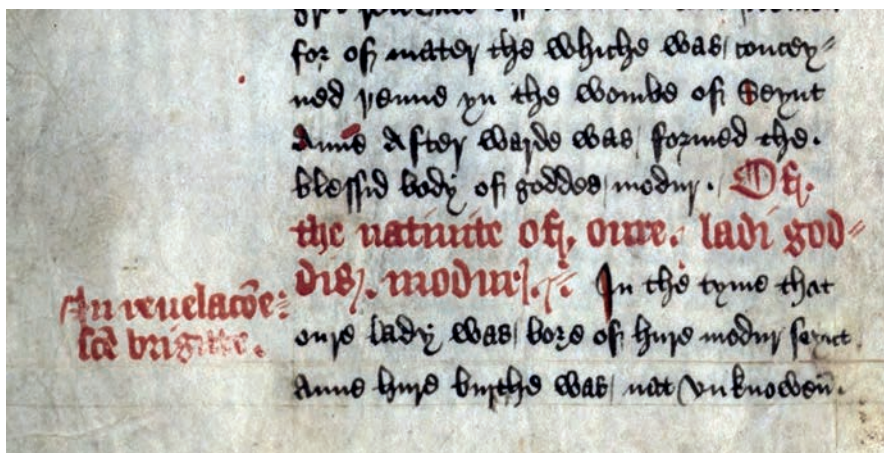


Fig. 1. Marginal annotation, main scribe: "In revelacione sancte brigitte". Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.42, fol. 5v, detail. Photograph: Trinity College, Cambridge. Reproduced with the permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.

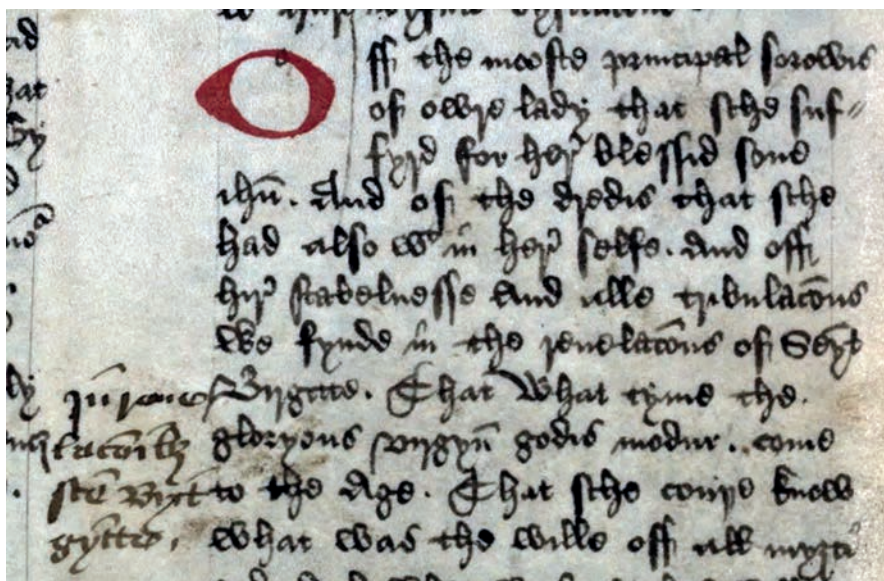


Fig. 2. Marginal annotation, non-scribal: "in revelacionibus sancte Birtgytte". Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.15.42, fol. 42v, detail. Photograph: Trinity College, Cambridge. Reproduced with the permission of the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge.

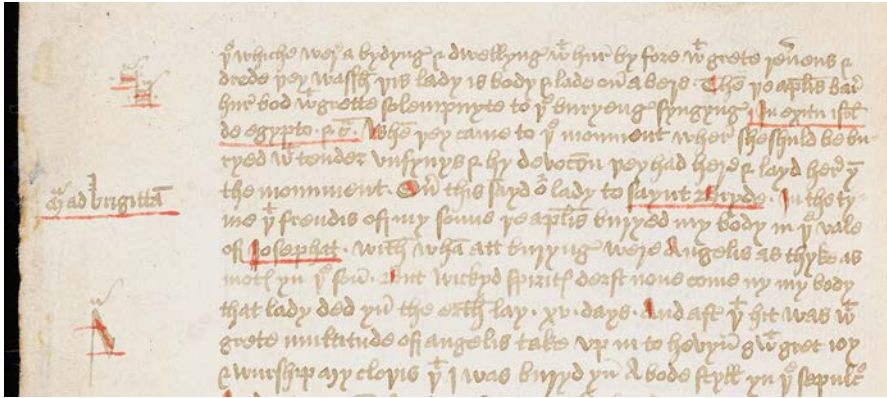


Fig. 3. Marginal annotation, main scribe: “Maria ad Brigittam”; red underline in the main text: “saynt Bryde”. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 578, fol. 46v, detail. Photograph: The Bodleian Libraries.

In Bodley the effect is even more noticeable. The main scribe rubricates and underlines “saynt Bryde” in the text itself at eleven locations (with two mentions left unembellished).<sup>14</sup> He further draws attention to four of those moments with a rubricated marginal annotation of “Bride” and once with “Maria ad Brigittam” (Fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> The marginal annotations match between the manuscripts except for the two additional ones found in Trinity fols. 5r and 5v, where there are none in Bodley, supporting the possibility these are an addition by the Trinity scribe. The other two scribes who note Birgittine passages on fols. 21v and 42v in Trinity, match places in Bodley with rubricated annotations in the margin. These overlaps suggest that the exemplars these two scribes were using might have had a standardized marginal apparatus, which was re-enforced by later scribes. All in all, such attentive attention-drawing to Birgitta’s visions validate her as a textual authority on par with the male sources, or of even higher importance, since she receives more emphasis than any other source.

#### THE ADAPTATION OF BIRGITTINE SOURCES

Some interesting patterns can be discerned in how the compiler adapts his Birgittine sources, most notably a building up of momentum towards more and more explicit reliance on the visionary’s authority. The first third or so of the borrowings (ap-

14 Fols. 11v, 18v, 19r (twice), 26v, 31v, 43v, 44r, 45v, 46r, 46v (fols. 47r, 47v not rubricated or underlined).

15 Fols. 26v, 31v, 43v, 44r, 46v.



proximately ten distinct borrowings), situated in the first third of the text, have been adapted out of the *Revelationes*' Marian first-person discourse and into a more neutral third-person discourse. Whereas in the source these passages would have been spoken in the voice of Mary with frequent use of "I" as grammatical subject, the compiler rewrites them so that the text integrates seamlessly with his own neutral third-person narrative voice. The first two *Revelationes* borrowings, in quick succession at the very beginning of the text, are identified in the margin of Trinity as being from Birgitta's *Revelationes*, but otherwise Birgitta is not mentioned in the text itself until the sixth borrowing on p. 35.

Thus, borrowings from the *Revelationes* concerning the Virgin Mary's conception, her birth, Joseph's various reactions during her pregnancy, their marital relationship, Mary's purity and its purifying power in others, Christ's nativity, and Simeon's prophecy, all go unremarked in the narrative itself. After a rather long borrowing concerning Christ's childhood retains Mary's first-person voice, two further borrowings from the *Revelationes* convert their source to third-person narrative, on the topics of Christ's flagellation and Mary's interaction with Christ on the cross. Meanwhile, all the *Sermo* borrowings are introduced as "the words" that the "angel said to Saint Birgitta", but because they are originally in a third-person voice (with no "I" from the angel) the juxtaposition of discourses is not as noticeable as when Mary speaks directly through Birgitta, through the compiler, to the reader.

Generally, the last third of the borrowings retain Mary's words to Birgitta in the first person, and are introduced as such, as in the first example: "In the boke of revelations of Seynt Brigitte we fynde that oure lady seide to hure these wordis that folowith of her dere sone Jhesu. 'My swete sone Jhesu ...'" ["In the book of Revelations of Saint Birgitta we find that our Lady said to her these words which follow about her dear son Jesus. 'My sweet son Jesus ...'"] (63/2–6). The topics presented in Mary's direct discourse concern aspects of Christ's childhood, miracles related to Christ's death, Mary's foreknowledge of her own death, Mary's burial, Mary's Assumption, the virtues of Mary's name, and the mercy of Mary. In other words, the last six borrowings, which comprise almost continuously the last six pages of the text (in the Blom-Smith edition) allow Mary to speak directly to the reader nearly uninterrupted for the end of her own story as well as for the concluding post-narrative chapters on the power of Mary's name and her mercy. The narrator effectively cedes the storytelling to the mother of God, citing Birgitta by name at every opportunity.

In its treatment of passages borrowed from the *Revelationes*, the *Mirror to Devout People* also retains Mary's voice as "gendered direct speech so that the (implied female)

reader can appropriate them for use as a personal meditation”, according to Gillespie.<sup>16</sup> Patterson similarly discusses how “extrabiblical information on the life of Christ and his Passion is only available through Mary’s accounts of her son as given to Birgitta in a series of visions”.<sup>17</sup> In the *Meditaciones*, however, passages kept in direct discourse concentrate in later parts of the apocryphal narrative where Christ is absent, particularly after the Ascension, and promote Mary’s agency apart from her son. Mary’s unmediated voice as an *auctor* (in turn channelled by Birgitta’s voice) in these post-Passion scenes shifts the tenor of the story away from the cheerful domesticity of Christ’s childhood and the humanly wrought violence of his death, and on to the hopeful future of a woman-led church—a remarkable shift not found in other devotional compilations.

One brief moment in the *Meditaciones* deserves closer attention in terms of a small but significant adaptation, by the compiler or possibly a later scribe, that amplifies Mary’s role. A borrowing from *Revelaciones* Book I.10:17–18, on Christ’s flagellation, is translated fairly closely from the original, if one looks at the Trinity witness:

And as we rede in the reuelacion of Seynt Brigitte, oure lady his modur was present at that skorgynge and at the furst stroke scheo fyll downe for sorowe and lay in sownynge til þat sche herd oon of his enemyes sey at the laste ende: ‘What woll 3e do with that man, woll 3e sle hym without dom and make vs the cause of his dethe?’ And with thes wordis **he** stirte to oure Lorde and kutte the bonde that was aboute his hondys in twey pertyes. (Blom-Smith 1992, 96/14–22; Trinity MS fol. 25r; my bolding)

[And as we read in the Revelations of Saint Birgitta, Our Lady his mother was present at that scourging and at the first stroke she fell down in sorrow and lay moaning until she heard one of his enemies say at the very end: ‘What will you do with that man, will you slay him without judgement and make us the cause of his death?’ And with these words he rushed to Our Lord and cut in two parts the bond that was around his hands.]

With respect to that “he” I have bolded in the last Middle English sentence above, a translation of the Latin “Et statim secuit vincula eius” [“And straightaway he cut his bonds”] (*Rev* I.10:18),<sup>18</sup> the Bodley witness makes a notable change:

And with þis wordes **she** sterte to our lord & cutt his bondes in tweyne. (Bodley MS fol. 26v, my bolding)

[And with these words she rushed to Our Lord and cut his bonds in two.]

<sup>16</sup> Gillespie 2006, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> Patterson 2016b, p. 194.

<sup>18</sup> Translation from Morris & Searby 2006, p. 68.

Which pronoun subject, *he* or *she*, is original to the *Meditaciones*, and which has been edited by a later scribe? Did the compiler make the decision to interpret the Latin verb as taking Mary as its subject instead of the nameless enemy, or was that revised in a later copying by a scribe?

Part of this confusion arises in the conversion of the passage from direct to indirect discourse. When Mary is actually speaking, as in the Latin, there is no doubt that *secuit* takes as a subject the person that just asked the question because otherwise it would be in the first-person conjugation instead of third-person. Since the Bodley and Trinity manuscripts disagree, it is difficult to pinpoint the source of this edit. Blom-Smith chooses Trinity as her base text based on the fact it is more accurate,<sup>19</sup> but this does not eliminate the possibility that the Trinity scribe reverted *she* to *he* against the compiler's original wishes. Regardless of who made this choice and at what point, someone decided that it should be Mary taking the action here and releasing her son—that Mary's agency better aligns with Birgitta's vision. Paradoxically, taking the passage out of Mary's voice opens the possibility to give her more power. As Ellis has commented regarding the shift from *he* to *she* in Bodley, this

fine disregard for plausibility presumably reflects his desire to eliminate all but the protagonists of the action, and, in particular, to enhance the role of the Virgin. The irony of choosing a text because of its authority and then rewriting it to make it more relevant or dramatic does not seem to have struck him at all.<sup>20</sup>

Such an approach is fairly typical of compilers throughout this late medieval period of English spirituality: Birgittine borrowings were used for their compelling details, sometimes in combination with the prestige of their visionary source, but ultimately the compiler had complete control over how the text would appear and usually had no qualms revising as they saw fit—in the case of the *Meditaciones*, to the benefit of Mary's position in the work.

#### MARY'S ELEVATED ROLE AFTER CHRIST'S DEATH

The *Meditaciones* presents a version of the Resurrection, Ascension, and following years that focuses on and elevates the Virgin Mary's role over what is presented in the gospel accounts, and even what is presented in the *Meditaciones vitae Christi*—instead taking its motivation from the *Sermo Angelicus*. Although the passages on Christ's

<sup>19</sup> Blom-Smith 1992, pp. lxiv–lxv.

<sup>20</sup> Ellis 1982, p. 181.

rising from the grave (beginning on p. 141 of Blom-Smith) do not borrow directly from Birgitta's visions, they follow the *Meditationes vitae Christi* tradition that also aligns with Birgitta's position on who first greeted the risen Christ: the Virgin Mary. As explained in the *Sermo Angelicus*, "although the bible also says that Mary Magdalene and the apostles were the first witnesses of the resurrection [Matthew 28:1–8], there can be no doubt that his worthy mother had certain knowledge of it before they did and that she had seen him alive and risen from the dead before they did" (*Sermo* 19:10).<sup>21</sup> The *Mirror to Devout People* and Nicholas Love's *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* likewise depict Christ as appearing first to his mother, who had been at prayer waiting outside the tomb.<sup>22</sup>

Where the *Meditationes* departs significantly from the *Meditationes vitae Christi* tradition and its English iterations is in its continuation into the months and years after the Ascension, when it claims the Virgin Mary, not Mary Magdalene, was the *apostola apostolorum*—or in Birgitta's words, the *magistra apostolorum*—leading the nascent Church into its first 13 years after Christ. This consistent emphasis on Mary's active role points towards the compiler's recurring interest in Birgitta's version of Mary. Neither Love nor the author of *Mirror to Devout People* discuss Mary of Nazareth in this period. We learn from the *Meditationes* of Mary's special treatment at Pentecost: "At the comynge of the Holy Gost that gloryous mayde and Crystes modur was amonge Crystis disciplis, where at that tyme scheo recyvid the sevyen 3iftis and the seuenfolde grace of the Holy Goste more plentyuously than alle othur and in so moche more fully than oþer" ["At the coming of the Holy Ghost, that glorious maid and Christ's mother was among Christ's disciples, at which time she received the seven gifts and the sevenfold grace of the Holy Ghost more plenteously than all others and much more fully than any other"] (154/2–7). This launches the text's elevation of Mary over the disciples. A few lines later, in the Trinity manuscript, one of the blue capital initials marks this change of topic: "Owre lady aftur the ascencion of hir dere sone Cryst Jhesu abode with the apostelys vnto the tyme that they were disparclyd, and that was sone after Crystis ascencion" ["Our Lady after the Ascension of her dear son Christ Jesus lived with the apostles until the time that they were dispersed, and that was soon after Christ's Ascension"] (154/11–13). Mary emerges as both the rhetori-

21 Translation from Morris & Searby 2015, p. 187.

22 *MVC*, cap. Lxxii, pp. 240–242. Patterson 2016a, ch. 29, p. 143. Love 2005 ch. L, p. 194–195. For more on the late antique tradition that Christ first appeared to his mother the Virgin Mary of Nazareth, and not to Mary Magdalene, see Shoemaker 2003, pp. 17–30; 2005, pp. 451–452; Jansen 1998, pp. 57–96. On this motif in *Mirror to Devout People*, see Patterson 2016a, ch. 29, p. 143; Gillespie 2006, pp. 144–145.



cal and narrative subject of the post-Ascension story, in stark contrast to the Gospels, which do not mention her.

The *Meditaciones* text describes how the apostles bore witness to the resurrection and other miracles, prayed and preached, and baptized many, all fulfilled with Mary's approval. Mary spoke out about her satisfaction with their activity: "in this besynes and vertu of the apostelis oure lady was gladde and thankid God, seyng the holy conuersacyon of the kyngedome of Dauid and seyng the redempcion of the pepull of Israel" ["in all this business and virtue of the apostles Our Lady was glad and thanked God, speaking the holy conversation of the kingdom of David and speaking on the redemption of the people of Israel"] (154/18–21). She is in such a position of authority that she can approve of the apostles' work and participate in the possibly public speaking of "holy conuersacyon". Not only that, but Mary mother of God, the "mooste notabull wytnesse" ["most notable witness"] of the resurrection, "spake and comenyd of the incarnation of Jhesu Cryste moche more kunnyngly and trewly than any oþer" ["spoke and communicated about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ much more wisely and truly than any other"] (155/4–5, 8–9). As the first person to whom Christ appeared, Mary pulls rank not only on Mary Magdalene but also on all the other male apostles. Her prioritized witnessing and special grace translates into an authoritative voice prioritized over any of the men in this community. No source is cited by the compiler for these passages building up to the Birgittine borrowing immediately following, and it is unclear where, if anywhere, he borrowed them from. The broader tradition that Mary was left on earth by Christ to mother and lead the apostles has its roots in Bede and Aelred of Rievaulx, among others, but no other late medieval gospel meditation from England takes up this fascinating narrative with such investment as the *Meditaciones*.<sup>23</sup>

All this promotion of Mary's power over the apostles crescendos to a climax with what comes next: a long borrowing from Birgitta's *Sermo Angelicus* detailing Mary's unusually extensive leadership of the apostles. In fact, one could surmise that these preceding passages became necessary for supporting the Birgittine interpolation, which takes such prominence that it seems likely its inclusion shaped the entire section both before and after. The borrowing is lengthy and I will only quote the first third:

For in the begynnyng sche lernyd all thynges more fully by the Holy goste, and clerly saw alle thynges, as we rede that an angell seide to Seynt Brigitte, as we fynde in her reuelacions these wordes that folowen. Aftur the ascension off oure Lorde to his glorious kyngedome he suffryd his modur to abyde in this worlde to the comforyng of thoo that wer good, for to corecke hem that wer yn myslyfe, **ffor by hir holy doctryne and conuersacyon sche presentyd moo sowlis to God than any othur seynt dide aftur the ascencyon of oure Lorde Jhesu, foor alle**

23 Gittens 1996, p. 106.

**tho cowde do or labour.** Sche was maistress off the apostelis, comferte of martiris, techer of confessours, moste clene and clere mirroure and schewer to virginis, solacere of wedewys, moste helefull monyschere to hem that were in wedlocke, and to all thoo that were in the feythe and the þe trew belyue moste perfyzt strengþere. To the apostolys that come to hir alle thinges that they couþe not parfytyl of hir blessid sone, sche schewid hit hem and reasonably declaryd hit to hem. (155/10–156/3, my bolding)<sup>24</sup>

While the first line echoes Luke 2:19 or 51, “She took these things and pondered them in her heart”, the rest follows very faithfully the second half of *Sermo Angelicus* chapter 19:11–20, which addresses each of the groups listed in the list: apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, widows, those in wedlock.<sup>25</sup> Before that, however, the compiler has inserted his own addition (bolded above) extending the power of Mary beyond the source material: she outperforms the apostles in her recruitment to the new sect, through the “conuersacyon” mentioned before but also through doctrine—an advantage rooted in a twist on that Lucan reference that Mary, who by means of the Holy Ghost, learned more fully and saw more clearly *than the other apostles*.<sup>26</sup> She does not “labour” or work at her evangelization because it is a spiritual gift resulting partly from her divine grace and partly from her own contemplation.

As for the aretology-like catalogue of Mary’s superlative powers, it places her at the top of a highly gendered institutional hierarchy—apostles, martyrs, confessors—as well as at the top of a social hierarchy spanned by Birgitta herself: virgins, widows, married people. The *Sermo Angelicus*’ original Latin passage, as translated in the final two sentences from the Middle English above:

[12] Erat enim magistra apostolorum, confortatrix martirum, doctrix confessorum, clarissimum speculum virginum, consolatrix viduarum, in coniugio viuencium saluberrima monitrix atque omnium in fide catholica perfectissima roboratrix. [13] Apostolis namque ad se venientibus

24 [“For in the beginning she learned all things more fully by the Holy Ghost, and clearly saw all things, as we read that an angel said to Saint Birgitta, as we find in her Revelations these words that follow. After the Ascension of Our Lord to his glorious kingdom, he allowed his mother to remain in this world in order to comfort good people, and to correct the wayward, for by her holy doctrine and conversation she presented more souls to God than any other saint did after the Ascension of Our Lord Jesus, for all they could do or labour. She was mistress/instructor of the apostles, comforter of martyrs, teacher of confessors, most clean and clear mirror of virgins, consoler of widows, most curative counsellor of the married, and the most perfect strengthener of everyone in the Catholic faith and the true belief. To the apostles that came to her, all the things that they did not fully know about her blessed Son, she showed it to them and explained it to them in a sensible way.”]

25 Sahlin discusses parts of this passage in the *Sermo* (Sahlin 2001, p. 94), as well as Falkeid 2022, pp. 80–81.

26 Leclercq 1984; Gittens 1996, pp. 105–112.

omnia, que de suo Filio perfecte non nouerant, reuelabat et rationabiliter declarabat. (*Sermo* 19:12–13)

*Magistra apostolorum* takes the primary position as the most important title, and it has quite an interesting history. The phrase *magistra apostolorum* emerged several hundred years before Birgitta's time in the writings of Rupert of Deutz (1085–1130), one of the greatest theologians of the 12th century.<sup>27</sup> He composed the first fully Marian commentary on the Song of Songs (an idea that came to him in a dream or vision) and in it refers to Mary as *magistra* nine times, ultimately deeming her "Magistra Magistorum, id est Apostolorum" ["the Teacher of Teachers, that is, the Teacher of the Apostles"].<sup>28</sup> Gittens, in his study of the epithet in Rupert's works, characterizes the title as "rarely used" elsewhere, appearing in only a few other sources before and after Birgitta: Richard of St Lawrence (d. 1230), the sermons of Jacob de Voragine (d. 1298), and St Antoninus (d. 1459).<sup>29</sup> The feminine form of *magister*, *magistra* encompasses a range of connotations, including expert, teacher, leader, exemplar, and demonstrator, and thus grants Mary a range of types of authority: spiritual, intellectual, and notably public. According to Chenu, in the 12th century *magister* "was a common name among preachers, school teachers, and the head of an apostolic team, applied to those totally dedicated to the Word of God, through the three means, i.e. reading, discussion, and preaching" (*legere, disputare, praedicare*).<sup>30</sup> Thus, in the Latin tradition *magister* operates in exclusively male-centred spheres of sacred, secular, and scholastic power, a power that carries over to *magistra*. While a multitude of commentators allowed that Mary might have been "mother" to and helped the apostles, only a few—among them Birgitta—dared to dub her *magistra apostolorum*, the teacher and leader of men. Any mention of Mary at this part of the story was extra-biblical, seeing as none of the Gospels mention her role amongst the disciples.

The *Meditaciones* compiler chose to translate *magistra* as Middle English *maistres*, the feminine form of *maister*, both from Old French. *Maister* encompasses a range of social positions from "a high official, civil or military" (1.a) to "holder of a master's degree" (6.a); so too does *maistres*, within what society allowed of the gender: "a woman who is in charge or control; the mistress of a household; a sovereign lady, ruler, queen; the most powerful woman; a woman who is one's superior in learning" (1.a–3.a).<sup>31</sup> *Maistres* was not commonly used in reference to the Virgin Mary, but rather more often to aristocratic women in romances or figures such as Nature, Philosophy, or Venus

27 Gittens 1996; Van Engen 1983; Rupert of Deutz 1967; Stöhr 1989, p. 30.

28 Gittens 1996, pp. 59, 61, 89; Rupert of Deutz 1967, p. 24, lines 494–495.

29 Gittens 1996, p. 105, citing Marracci 1694, pp. 266–267.

30 Gittens 1996, p. 125, citing and translating Chenu 1957, p. 261.

31 *Middle English Dictionary*: "maister, n.", and "maistres, n."

(judging by the quotations in the Middle English Dictionary). Here the compiler's choice of *maistres* instead of "teacher" for *magistra* leaves room for him to use *techer* for *doctrrix* later on in the sentence. "Teacher of confessors" places Mary in a role of startling authority extending beyond the apostles and to all priests involved in the new church. Mary possesses not just the powers of mercy and intercession rooted in the power of her son, but independent, authoritative, informed power.

For Rupert, Mary's position as *magistra apostolorum* and *doctrrix confessorum* finds its scriptural basis in the allusion the *Meditaciones* compiler chose to open the passage: Luke 2:19/51, that Mary had "kept all these things in her heart": that is, spent Christ's life contemplating on what she experienced. In his Marian commentary on the canticles, Rupert refers to the earlier contemplative time in Mary's life as *tempus tacendi* and the later active time as *tempus loquendi*, derived from Ecclesiastes 3:7 "a time to be silent and a time to speak".<sup>32</sup> In other words, her silence throughout much of the Gospels earned her the right—even the obligation—to preach and prophesy. The *Meditaciones* takes seriously Mary's meditative past: more than 15% of the text discusses the time before, during, and just after the Annunciation scene (longer than any other Middle English life of Christ). This includes a long borrowing from the treatise *Of Three Workings in Man's Soul*, likely by Richard Rolle, which presents an unusual (pre-)Annunciation scene where Mary reads, meditates, contemplates, and enters a rapture as she imagines herself as the Old Testament prophecies foretelling the Incarnation, just before Gabriel's arrival.<sup>33</sup> The inclusion of this particular version of the Annunciation scene, I have previously suggested, invites the reader

to gaze upon Mary as in a mirror, to re-create themselves in her image, both physically and mentally—from the Annunciation through to the very last scenes. By incorporating such a large interpolation from *Of Three Workings*, this intriguing gospel meditation confirms the importance of *imitatio Mariae* at precisely this point in a reader's devotional experience.<sup>34</sup>

The extended Annunciation scene in the *Meditaciones* prepares the reader not only to accept Mary's elevated status as wise leader after the Ascension, but to be willing to see themselves as capable of following her example. In addition, just before the Annunciation scene, the visions of Elizabeth of Hungary are explicitly cited as the source of the scene where Mary climbs the temple steps, as a devout, studious girl in advance

32 Gittens 1996, p. 81.

33 Miles 2017; 2020a, pp. 175–195 on *Of Three Workings*, pp. 196–199 on its interpolation into *Meditaciones*.

34 Miles 2020a, p. 199.

of the Annunciation, further reinforcing the validity of holy contemplative women as sources of authentic visionary insight.

Though to a lesser extent than the *Meditaciones*, the *Mirror to Devout People* also emphasizes Mary “as a model contemplative and a paradigm of reflection and meditation on the events that unfolded around her”.<sup>35</sup> Luke 2:19/51 becomes an explanation for how Mary’s watchful silence preserved gospel events for the apostles to write down: “But oure lady kepte wel all in here herte haply þat sche mygth the bettyr telle hyt to hem that schulde wryte hyt aftyrwarde” [“But fortunately Our Lady kept everything in her heart so that she might better be able to relate it to them that would write it afterwards”].<sup>36</sup> In contrast, in the *Meditaciones*, instead of enabling male-mediated text, Mary’s contemplation directly fuels her own “holy conversation” and public preaching. The *Mirror* compiler stops far short of what the *Meditaciones* compiler dares: to present Mary as a model leader and a paradigm of preaching and judgement for the apostles and all involved in the early church community. The *Revelaciones* and *Sermo Angelicus* borrowings transform the contemplative Virgin Mary into an active, assertive Virgin Mary, one released from the obligations of mother and wife and ready to assume power in the vacuum of Christ’s death. In many ways this version of Mary echoes Birgitta, widow and mother (though with living children), who leaves the obligations of her household back in Sweden and moves to Rome to lead her own small community of followers and spread the word of her visions. Both women display a charismatic leadership, Birgitta’s modelled on Mary’s, and Mary’s inspired by the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The *Meditaciones* compiler shifts focus off the other central figures in the post-Ascension group in order to put more emphasis on the Virgin Mary. Predictably, Birgitta’s visions downplay Mary Magdalene’s role in order to make room for the Mother of God, Birgitta’s exemplar for channelling the divine. The *Meditaciones* compiler follows suit and places Mary Magdalene second to Mary of Nazareth at every opportunity, starting with Christ appearing to his mother first in contradiction to the gospels, and through to the new church community. Then he reserves only one sentence addressing Mary Magdalene, where she humbly follows the Virgin Mary’s lead: “Pryncipaly Mary Magdleyne was euermore nexte hure to do hure alle maner seruyse as lowly handmayde in alle affections, deuotions and heuenly contemplacions” [“Principally Mary Magdalene was always next to her to do for her all manner of service as lowly handmaiden in all affections, devotions, and heavenly contemplations”] (158/9–11). So disappears Mary Magdalene as preacher and *apostola apostolorum* (a title that emerged in the 12th

35 Gillespie 2006, p. 145.

36 *Mirror*, 34/200–201; Patterson 2016a, p. 195.

century and became widespread by the 13th), while the preaching *magistra apostolorum*, Mary of Nazareth, takes centre stage.<sup>37</sup>

*A Mirror to Devout People* and other gospel meditations likewise emphasize the almost “protective custody” of John the Evangelist over a more passive Mary once she has lost her male family members, following through on Christ’s command putting his mother in John’s keeping (John 19:26–27). Chapter 33 in *A Mirror* includes long passages detailing her subservient relationship to John. The *Meditaciones*, in contrast, contains a shorter description with an interesting twist on the situation:

Thirtene 3ere and more aftur the assencyon of hure sone Jhesu sche was conuersant amonge the apostelys, and in alle that tyme Gabriell and Seynt Jon the Euangelyste hadde her in keypyng, and pou-alle hit be so that alle the disciplis worschapid her and had her in hize reuerence and drede with alle seruycz and loue that they coupe and my3t do to hir. (157/22–158/3)

[Thirteen years and more after the Ascension of her son Jesus, she was conversant among the apostles, and in all that time Gabriel and Saint John the Evangelist had her in keeping, and throughout it all ensured that all the disciples worshipped her and had her in high reverence and dread with all service and love that they could and might give to her.]

John “keeps” Mary not to control her but to ensure that the rest of the apostles pay her due respect and accept *her* control. The compiler complies with the necessity of respecting the scriptural story, yet manages to subvert its patriarchal hierarchy by having John police the other men instead of his female ward. At this point in the text, the compiler seems eager to move on to the next Birgittine borrowing and hastens to cover other aspects less obviously relevant to the elevation of Mary’s role in the story, and to adapt them to that priority.

Interpolations from Birgitta’s *Revelationes* and *Sermo Angelicus* focused on Mary dominate the remainder of the gospel meditation, with the effect of mutually elevating both women. With Mary’s leadership role established, the next passage blends verses from *Sermo* chapters 16 and 17 in order to depart from the narrative arc to circle back around to themes building up Mary’s life to this moment. The borrowing reflects backwards to discuss the sorrows of the Virgin, on the young Mary learning to dread and love God, to manage her foreknowledge of her son’s pains at the Passion, and to balance the bittersweet juxtaposition of the joys of her conception of Christ with the grief of his death. With this borrowing the *Meditaciones* compiler continues his interest in Mary as a contemplative with panoptic knowledge of past, present, and future—much like the visionary Birgitta herself. The compiler weaves in another parallel to Birgitta: also like the saint, the Virgin goes on pilgrimage simultaneously to revisit the physi-

37 Jansen 2000, p. 63.

cal places of the Passion and to revisit the attendant emotions she has been foreseeing her entire life. Mary experiences “dyuers materis of contemplacions and ouer-all full of teres of loue and compassion” [“diverse matters of contemplation and overall full of tears of love and compassion”] (164/5–6) triggered by these locations.

The passage on Mary’s Assumption likewise highlights Mary’s contemplation at that moment. Borrowings from the *Revelationes* cover the visit from the angel concerning the timing of her death, and then how Mary herself describes the Assumption as a ravishing, closely following *Rev.* VI.62:4: “when I shuld passe oute of þis world my mynd was rauysshid yn byholdyng þe wunderfull cherite of God. Then my solle yn þe contemplacion was replete with so gret ioy hit myzt nott hold hydself but yn þe consideracion my solle was departyd fr þe body” [“when I should pass out of this world, my mind was ravished in beholding the wonderful charity of God. Then my soul in this contemplation was replete was so great joy it might not hold itself in but in this consideration my soul was departed from the body”] (166/11–16). In many ways this “ravishing beholding” and contemplation evokes what Mary experienced in the moments leading up to Christ’s conception and just after. The long borrowing from *Of Three Workings in Man’s Soul* details the physical effects of Mary’s high contemplation, looking forward to the actual moment of the Incarnation: “owre lady than brennyng yn the loue of God more than sched hed byfore, whan scheo felyd that sche had conceyued” [“Our Lady then burning in the love of God more than she had before, when she felt that she had conceived”] (30/19–20). So the *Meditaciones* comes full circle to have the Assumption echo the Annunciation: the spiritual ecstasy Mary cultivated through her contemplation, and felt at the spark of life inside her, she feels again when the spark of life goes out of her. These flashes of connection between divine and human find expression in the ravishing of the holiest woman in the biblical narrative.

Finally, the *Meditaciones* concludes with two chapters on broader, more standard issues of Mary’s intercession: the power of Mary’s name and the mercy of Mary. These consist entirely of borrowings from the *Revelationes* I.9, II.23, and I.50. Interestingly, the compilation’s last sentence presents Christ’s voice speaking to Mary, from within Birgitta’s visions, and addressing those readers of the Revelations and thus the *Meditaciones*: “Oure Lord sayde þes wordis to hys moder folowyng: ‘Whoso nempnyth þi name and tristith yn the with purpose to amende hys dedys he shall haue þe kyngdome of hevyn’” [“Our Lord said these following words to his mother: ‘Whoever says your name and trusts in you with the aim of amending his deeds, he shall have the kingdom of heaven’”] (171/1–4).<sup>38</sup> Instead of the power of the name of Jesus, a dominant phe-

38 The Latin (*Rev.* I.50:23) has “nomen tuum” whereas the Morris & Searby translation has not “your name” but “my name” for a reason that is not clear (or by error) (2006, p. 142).



nomenon in this late medieval period, Christ himself endorses the total power of his mother's name.<sup>39</sup> This reversal of the expected motif signals yet again that this compilation's top priority is the Virgin's independent, unmediated power. Of course, it would never be denied that she ultimately derives her power from her son, but the compiler elides this fact at every turn and takes any opportunity to highlight the centrality of this woman's role in the scriptural story.

### CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the *Meditaciones* compiler has composed a life of Christ that stands apart from the *Meditaciones vitae Christi* tradition and the Middle English gospel meditations from the same period. He has combined a life of Christ with a life of Mary, as he announces in his first line; the life of Christ is fairly standard, while the life of Mary is decidedly not. His choice of sources to interpolate, particularly the critical mass of Birgittine borrowings as well as the long *Of Three Workings* borrowing for the Annunciation, methodically shape Mary as both expert contemplative in private and active leader in public. The frequent explicit citation of Birgitta's visions as a source of these passages granting Mary such agency connects the two women: wise, powerful, with privileged insight into God's plan.

As I mention above, this agenda suggests the compiler thought his readers would allow if not appreciate this combined contemplative/active Virgin as presented by another contemplative/active medieval woman, Birgitta. Mary had just such a position in the aesthetic imaginary of Birgitta's Order of St Saviour, of course, where the much-borrowed *Sermo Angelicus* formed the spiritual core of the nuns' weekly liturgy.<sup>40</sup> Syon's abbess rooted her leadership prerogative in the power of both Mary and Birgitta, and so in that way the leadership Mary performs after the Ascension in the *Meditaciones* would be immediately relevant. I would say that though it cannot yet be proven, the women readers of Syon Abbey could possibly have been the intended readership of the *Meditaciones*, as they were for the *Mirror to Devout People*, even if the *Meditaciones* compiler declines to state that as explicitly as the Carthusian monk who wrote the *Mirror*. So a monk of Sheen could have been the compiler, but so could a brother of Syon. However, he never consistently invokes a common community shared by himself and the intended readers, as we sense in the *Myroure of Oure Ladye*, a translation and commentary of the *Sermo* written by a brother for his Birgit-

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39 Renevey 2022.

40 Miles 2018.



tine sisters; this absence of an implied shared community could be a stylistic choice, or it could suggest he was not a Birgittine brother at Syon.

But is important to remember that beyond Syon, other monastic and lay communities also showed interest in Birgitta: convents like Barking and Dartford, and aristocratic readers like Cecily Neville, Margaret Beaufort, and others. The question is, would there have been enough momentum or resources in these other circles to precipitate the composition of such a long and ambitious text? I feel this is an important question in general, when considering not just the *Meditaciones*, but also other large Birgitta-centred textual projects, such as the two translations of the full Revelations, about which we know very little in terms of provenance.

*Meditaciones domini nostri* offers important new evidence for how Birgitta's innovative, if not radical, presentation of the Virgin Mary as a charismatic leader appealed to a late medieval English compiler and other scribes and readers. Much remains to be explored in this compelling text and its two manuscript witnesses.

#### APPENDIX: BIRGITTINE BORROWINGS IN *MEDITACIONES DOMINI NOSTRI*

	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Blom-Smith 1992 page/ lines</i>	<i>Birgittine source</i>	<i>In-text citation</i>	<i>Cambridge, Trinity College MS B.15.42 annotations</i>	<i>Oxford, BL MS Bodley 578 annotations</i>
1	Mary's conception	2/2–22	<i>Rev.</i> I.9:2–4	none	fol. 5r: "Birgitta" rubricated in margin	none
2	Mary's birth	3/6–4/9	<i>Rev.</i> VI.56:2–6	none	fol. 5v: "In revelacione sancte brigitte" rubricated in margin ( <i>Fig. 1</i> )	none
3	Joseph's doubts	32/1–13	<i>Rev.</i> VI.59:5–7	none	none	none
4	Joseph's reaction to Mary's pregnancy	32/20–33/10	<i>Rev.</i> VII.25:6–7	none	none	none

5	How Mary and Joseph lived together	33/14–34/20	<i>Rev.</i> VI.59:8–14	none	none	none
6	Power of Mary to abate sin	35/7–12	unknown	“The angell seide to Brigitte”	fol. 13v: “Birgitta” in margin	fol. 11v: “seynt bryde” rubricated in text
7	Christ’s nativity	39/18–42/7	<i>Rev.</i> VII.21:3–19	none	none	none
8	Christ’s nativity	42/23–43/9	<i>Rev.</i> VII.21:20–22	none	none	none
9	Christ’s nativity	43/23–44/9	<i>Rev.</i> I.10:13	none	none	none
10	Simeon’s prophecy	54/16–23	<i>Rev.</i> VI.57:4–5	none	none	none
11	Christ’s childhood	63/2–64/17	<i>Rev.</i> VI.58:3–14	“In the boke of revelacions of Seynt Brigitte we fynde ... Here endith the wordis of oure lady that sche spake to Seynt Brygitte.”	fol. 21r: “Birgitta” in margin	fol. 18v: “Seynt Bryde” rubricated fol. 19r: “Seynt Bryde” rubricated, twice
12	Flagellation	96/14–22	<i>Rev.</i> I.10:17–18	“And as we rede in the reuelacion of Seynt Brigitte”	fol. 25r: “Birgitta” rubricated in margin	fol. 26v: “Seynt Bryde” red underline; “Bride” rubricated in margin
13	Mary nearly loses hope	100/12–14	<i>Rev.</i> I.10:19–20	none	none	none

14	Miracles with Christ's death	116/16–118/13	<i>Rev.</i> VI.11:1–10	"We fynde in the Reuelacions of Seynt Birgitte that on a tyme our lady Godis modur aperid to her and seide ..."	fol. 31r: "Birgit-ta" rubricated in margin	fol. 31v: "Seynt Bryde" red underline in text; "Bride" rubricated in margin
15	Mary after the Ascension	155/11–157/11	<i>Sermo</i> 19:11–19	"As we rede that an angell seide to Seynt Brigitte, as we fynde in her reuelacions these wordes that folowen ..."	none	fol. 43v: "Seynt Bryde" red underline in text; "Bride" in margin
16	Mary's sorrows and foreknowledge	158/14–160/14	<i>Sermo</i> 16:2:3–4, 8, 9, 11, 19; <i>Sermo</i> 17:6; <i>Sermo</i> 18:11; <i>Sermo</i> 17:7–8	"we fynde in the reuelacions of Seynt Birgitte that what tyme ..."	fol. 42v: "in revelacionibus sancte Birt-gytte" in margin ( <i>Fig. 2</i> )	fol. 44r: "Seynt Bride" red underline in text; "Bride" rubricated in margin
17	Mary's pilgrimages	163/22–164/7	<i>Rev.</i> VI.61:3	"And also our lady sayd to Saynt Bride, ..."	–	fol. 45v: "saynt Bride" red underline in text
18	Mary's Assumption	165/20–166/6	<i>Rev.</i> VI.62:1–6	"Ouer þis oure lady Godis moder sayde to Seynt Bryde þes wurdis þat folowith, as hit is wryte yn þe boke of hur reuelacions ..."	–	fol. 46r: "Seynt Bryde" red underline in text
19	Angelic visit and Mary's death	166/10–167/2	<i>Rev.</i> VI.62:1–6	none	–	none

20	Mary's burial	167/14–21	<i>Rev.</i> VI.62:7–8	“Ouer this sayd our lady to Saynt Bryde: ...”	–	fol. 46v: “Maria ad Brigittam” rubricated in margin ( <i>Fig. 3</i> ); “saynt Bryde” red underlined in-text
21	Mary's Assumption	168/4–12	<i>Sermo</i> 21:6–7	none	–	none
22	Mary's arrival in heaven	168/12–169/4	<i>Sermo</i> 20:19–21	“Furthermore þe angell sayde: ...”	–	none
23	Virtues of Mary's name	169/7–170/10	<i>Rev.</i> I.9:6–10	“Ovre lady Godis moder sayd to Seynt Bryde”	–	fol. 47r: “seynt Bryde” un-embellished in text
24	Mary's mercy	170/12–171/1	<i>Rev.</i> II.23:2–5	“Owre lady seid to Seynt Bryde: ...”	–	fol. 47v: “seynt Bryde” un-embellished in text
25	Power of saying Mary's name	171/1–4	<i>Rev.</i> I.50:23	“Oure Lord sayde þes wordis to hys moder folowyng: ...”	–	

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ANN M. HUTCHISON

## Syon Abbey's First Professions in 1420

### *Rites and Participants*

On 21 April 1420, the first professions to the new monastery of St Saviour, Our Lady St Mary, and St Bridget of Syon, commonly known as Syon Abbey, were celebrated.<sup>1</sup> For many this, rather than the laying of the cornerstone by King Henry V on 22 February 1415 or the charter of foundation signed by the king on 3 March 1415, marked the actual foundation of Syon Abbey.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, my intention is to investigate the Birgittine rite of profession as it was set out in the *Regula Salvatoris* and as it developed at Syon. I also hope to give an indication of the identity of some of the participants in the 1420 ceremony with a view to determining what may have made Syon Abbey such an appealing choice for English religious women.

In founding her new order, St Birgitta was intent on renewing and restoring the original aims of monasticism, since she felt that many of these practices had been forgotten or fallen into decay. As the Prologue to the *Regula Salvatoris* indicates, she felt that, as instructed by Christ in a vision, she was to plant a new vineyard with branches

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1 I would like to thank Claes Gejrot for sending me a copy of the relevant pages of his edition of the Syon *Martiloge*, BL Additional MS 22,285 fol. 14 and later the book itself; see Gejrot 2015, pp. 54–55; Fletcher 1933 p. 24 also translates the passage in the *Martiloge*; Aungier 1840, p. 38 has a different date, “On the 5th February, 1420 (7 Hen. V) the first profession or monastic engagement, by vow, took place in this monastery, ...”; Deanesly 1915, p. 101 misquoting from the Syon *Martiloge* (fol. 14b) has “Anno domini 1420, uicesimo die mensis aprilis ... celebrata erat prima professio ordinis sancti Saluatoris de Sion ...”, and p. 129, misquoting again from BL Additional MS 22,285 fol. 14 (the *Martiloge*), she has “Anno domini M<sup>o</sup>CC-CC<sup>o</sup>XX<sup>o</sup> primo die mensis aprilis celebrata erat prima professio ordinis sancti Saluatoris de Sion ...”; Johnston 1996, perhaps following Deanesly, also has 1 April 1420, p. 50.

2 Fletcher 1933, p. 20.

that would take root and that from this vineyard many other vineyards which had been arid for a long time would be renewed and bear fruit.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, in seeking the most dedicated sisters for her new order, Birgitta endeavoured, following monastic tradition, to make admission difficult and to examine the motives of prospective nuns with great care.

## PART I. THE RITE OF PROFESSION

Originally the postulancy and the novitiate were combined and at the end the profession took place. The postulant had to seek admission on three occasions and as the Middle English version of the Rule states: "If ony praye to be take to this<sup>4</sup> religion, she owith neuer to be receyued tofore an hool zere" ["If anyone desires to be accepted in this religious order, she ought not to be received before an entire year"].<sup>5</sup> On the first attempt to seek admission, she is told to return after three months and that meanwhile the community will consider her petition. On the second occasion she is questioned by the abbess: "with what desyre she askith the religion, or wyth what bondys she is holde in the worlde" ["with how strong a desire she seeks to join this religious order, or with what ties she is held in the world"]. Having heard her response, the abbess then cautions her: "vnder the liknes of good, is hydde the snare of falsnes, and the inconsideracion of thyngys to come deceyueth many" ["under the semblance of goodness is hidden the snare of falseness, and the lack of consideration of what may occur deceives many"], and asks her to return after "somme monethis" ["some months"] to see if her desire persists.<sup>6</sup> On the postulant's third attempt, "the duresse and sharpnes of the ordre, contempt of the worlde and forzetynge of fadir and modre, must be shewid to hir" ["the severity and strictness of the order, contempt of the world, and the

3 *Regula Salvatoris* (hereafter *RS*), Prologue 2:18, 21: "Ego plantabo michi nouam vineam, vbi apportabuntur palmites et mittent radices ... Ex. hac autem vinea multe vinee longo tempore arentes renouari incipient et facere fructum iuxta diem innouacionis sue."

4 From MS P (see note 5 below).

5 I have used Laura Saetveit Miles' 2005 Middle English edition of *The Rewyll of Seynt Sauoure* (hereafter *Rewyll*) based on Cambridge University Library MS Ff.6.33 (C) and collating London, St Paul's Cathedral MS 5 (P) (Guildhall Library MS 22524) and Syon Abbey fragments 1, leaves a–d (S), to indicate how the English interpreted the *RS*. Here *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 47v, p. 68). Miles also includes the section numbers from the *RS*.

6 *Rewyll* 9 (fols. 47v–48r, p. 68).

forgetting of father and mother, must be revealed to her”].<sup>7</sup> If she promises to follow this guidance and if the community agrees that “of hir lyfe ys noo dow3te” [“that of her life (as a nun) there is no doubt”], then she should return at the end of the year to be admitted. The Rule also notes that “the 3eer of preef” [“the year of trial”]<sup>8</sup> within the monastery, as practised in other religions, does not apply here.

Much later changes were made to this practice. In 1563, or possibly early 1564, when Syon was exiled in Spanish Flanders, Abbess Catherine Palmer sent a petition to Pope Pius IV describing the difficulties of their exile and seeking assistance in various matters, including their wish to preserve their identity as Syon Abbey formerly at Isleworth in England and, most importantly, requesting a *sanatio* for any infraction of Canon Law or of their Rule or Constitutions which the exigencies of their exile had imposed upon them. The Papal Rescript, given on 8 May 1564 at Rome, granted the abbess's petition and, in particular, the *sanatio* dispensing all infringements of Canon Law or their Rule which might have occurred in the past, or might occur in the future, as a result of the “peculiar difficulties” of their exile.<sup>9</sup> The changes in the arrangements for reception can be noted in the case of Mary Champney when Syon was at Mishagen:<sup>10</sup> sometime early in 1568 she asked to be received and was sent away “for certayne monethes” [“for certain months”], after that, however, she spent her year of preparation in the community, as authorized by the Papal Rescript.<sup>11</sup> In modern times, in *The Rule of Our Saviour* printed in 1914 reflecting Canon Law, there is a postulancy of twelve months, but voting took place after ten months to give time for the ceremony to be prepared, and then again during the novitiate voting for the first profession took place after ten months for the same reason.<sup>12</sup>

While the abbess admitted the postulant to the novitiate in the revised Rule, it was always the case that the bishop of the diocese was to receive the profession of a sister

7 As Ingvar Fogelqvist explains, “contempt of the worlde (*contemptus mundi*)” refers to the obligation to despise the world meaning “the world dominated by the power of sin” and thus opposed to the love of Christ. He notes that this theme is mentioned frequently in the *RS*; see Fogelqvist 1991, p. 218 and n. 55.

8 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 48r, p. 68).

9 The Papal Rescript was given on 8 May 1564 at Rome, but did not reach the Bishop of Cambrai until 7 June 1565. The Rescript is translated in *PSF* 12.1 Jan.–Feb. 1964, pp. 19–22. I would like to thank Sister Anne Smyth, O.Ss.S., for her assistance in verifying this information.

10 Mishagen is about 16 km north of Antwerp.

11 ‘The Lyfe’ is preserved in British Library, Additional MS 18,650; see fol. 3, also *PSF* 13.3 May–June 1965, p. 82 and *passim*. An edited version is Hutchison 2002.

12 I am grateful to a communication from Sister Anne Smyth, O.Ss.S., who described the practice in recent years.

after the consent of the entire community.<sup>13</sup> In fact at Syon on the occasion of the first professions on 21 April 1420 it was Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, rather than Richard Clifford, Bishop of London, who received the vows of 27 sisters, five priests, two deacons, and four lay brothers. This may well have been because of the close association of Chichele and Henry V, both of whom wished to inject “new vigour into the orthodox but reforming stance of the established church” and who felt the need, in language reminiscent of Christ’s words to Birgitta, “to sweep away the *pulvis negligentiae* [“the dust of negligence”] of prelates in the face of Lollard heretics”. He therefore fully supported Henry’s project in founding the monastic houses of Sheen (Carthusian) and Syon. After the king’s death, he maintained their privileges and was enrolled as a benefactor in the Syon *Martiloge*.<sup>14</sup>

A preliminary step not mentioned in the *RS*, but found in the Middle English version of the Rule, states that before being presented to the bishop, “she must be clipped hir here of the Abbes aftir the manere of nonnes” [“she (the candidate) must have her hair shorn by the Abbess in the manner of nuns”].<sup>15</sup> Then follow a number of introductory ceremonies unique to the *RS*: before the candidate enters the Church, the bishop first checks to ascertain that she is “fre and loos or dischargyd from euery bonde of the chirch” [“free and loose or discharged from every bond of the Church”],<sup>16</sup> such as marriage, other vows, or excommunication. He then determines that she is not constrained by sorrow, “worldly aduersite” [“worldly adversity”] or unpaid debts, but that her motive is only love of Christ. Finally he confirms that she desires to enter in the name of Christ and in honour of the Virgin Mary his mother.<sup>17</sup> When the bishop admits her to the church, a banner with the crucified Christ on one side, symbolizing patience and poverty, and the Virgin Mary on the other, representing chastity and humility, is carried before her.<sup>18</sup> This in material form reinforces the three virtues so important to Birgitta’s ideal for her Order and found throughout the Rule: humility, chastity, and poverty.<sup>19</sup> As the rite of profession continues, further examples of the symbolic use of objects and clothing become evident as their interior, spiritual sig-

13 *RS* 10:103.

14 They also shared a belief in a close alliance of Church and state; see Catto 2004. See also Gejrot 2015, p. 134 for his inclusion as a benefactor of Syon.

15 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 48r, p. 68).

16 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 48r, p. 68).

17 *RS* 10:104–106.

18 *RS* 10:107–108; *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 49r, p. 69).

19 “The begynnyng of this religion and of helth; is very mekenes and pure chastite and wylfull pouerte” [“The origin of this religion and of health is true humility and pure chastity and deliberate poverty”]; see *Rewyll* 1 (fol. 42r, p. 62).

nificance is made clear, something very much part of Birgitta's programme of reform.

Thus, after blessing the ring, the bishop in his prayer to God, who with mercy and compassion has "spoused ... a newe spowse" ["spoused ... a new spouse"],<sup>20</sup> sets out its outward and interior significance: the nun will bear the sign of being Christ's new bride "in hir handes owtewardly" ["in her hands outwardly"] while "ynwardly" ["inwardly"] demonstrating her commitment to Him in "feyth and charite" ["faith and love"]. The nun's formal vow follows in which she promises to God and to the bishop on His behalf that she will obey her superiors and live according to the Rule of St Austin [Augustine] and the Constitutions of St Birgitta until the end of her life. As one has come to expect in a Birgittine context, the bishop then sets out the implications of the vow: he states that she must love nothing so much as her God and, he continues, "with suche desire it longyth to the [thee] to assent in hym." ["(love God) with such desire it is fitting for you entrust yourself to Him"].<sup>21</sup> The nun, in her turn, replies "I assente in my God with all the hert and all the sowle offerynge me to hym in all simplite of herte." ["I place my trust in my God with all my heart and all my soul offering myself to Him in all humility of heart"]. It is after the bishop has assented to the sister on behalf of God and prayed that Christ be "sekirly festenid" ["securely fastened"]<sup>22</sup> in her soul and she in him that he puts the ring on her right hand and consecrates her as "the spouse of God, and in to his euerlastyng possession."<sup>23</sup>

While there are similarities with other monastic traditions, particularly the Dominican, but also the Benedictine, with regard to the reception and profession of the sister, Birgitta's influence is seen in the attention to detail of the habit and of the symbolism of each part.<sup>24</sup> The conferring of the habit occurs after the Offertory when her habit is taken to the altar and put before the bishop to bless. In his prayer—and it is noteworthy that the prayers of the bishop reveal the symbolism of each part of the habit—he indicates that the sister will wear the habit "in token of mekenes and of penaunce" ["in token of meekness and penance"] so that having left "the vanyte of the worlde" ["the vanity of the world"] she deserves to be clothed in true meekness, or humility.<sup>25</sup> After the bishop has blessed the habit, the candidate comes forth to be clothed in bare feet and wearing only "a kyrtyll" (the gown worn under the outer clothing). When placing the "cote", or tunic, on the sister, the bishop prays that God will give her "very penaunce in thi conscience, and parfytted contricion in hert" ["true penance in con-

20 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 49v, p. 69).

21 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 50r, p. 70).

22 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 50r, p. 70).

23 *RS* 11:113–115.

24 Fogelqvist 1991, p. 221.

25 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 51r, p. 71).

science, and perfect contrition in heart"], thus emphasizing the aspect of penitence and introducing the need for contrition.<sup>26</sup> The shoes mark the "ryȝt goynge to þi feete" ["correct direction of thy feet"] to proceed in the "weye of helth" ["way of health"]<sup>27</sup> so that she will never submit to sin, and the bishop's prayer continues by asking that Christ will give her "very amendment of synnes doo bfore" ["true amendment of sins committed beforehand"] as well as awareness of those to come. The cowl is next and at this point the bishop refers to Christ as hope of all Christians and asks that He grant the sister hope and trust in her heart so that she may hope for God's mercy and not forget his "ryȝtwisnes" ["justice"], and that she not so fear his "seuerite and sternesse" ["severity and sternness"] that she overlook his "pyte and goodnes" ["compassion and goodness"]. In other words, Birgitta wishes the sister to remember both God's justice and his mercy and not neglect one at the expense of the other. Here she is following a traditional theme found in the Rule of St Benedict.<sup>28</sup>

The mantle, or cape, is next, and it, like the ring, represents "very feyth" ["true faith"]. Perhaps Birgitta had in mind Benedict's precept that the monk should start off "clothed ... with faith."<sup>29</sup> The bishop prays that God, the source of true faith, "strengthen and conferme" the soul of the sister in this true faith and grant that she believe in what should be believed and persevere in "this good" all her life.<sup>30</sup> Holding the cape together is, as the Middle English puts it, "a boton of tre" ["a wooden button"].<sup>31</sup> The wooden button, as the bishop's prayer informs the sister, should help the sister remember "the tre of the crosse" ["the tree of the cross"] to which for His great love of us Christ allowed himself to be nailed and to suffer a most "bittir deth" ["bitter death"], and He must "nayle, festyn, and ouere bete" ["nail, fasten, and beat upon"] her soul with the memory of His Passion so that her fervent love be only to God and that the "fyre of godly charite" ["fire of godly love"] embrace her and grant her rest "in his blissid arme, in which all holy seyntyng resten" ["in his blessed army, in which all holy saints rest"]. For Birgitta, remembrance of Christ's humanity and his Passion played a central role in her order, and we see this in the crosses and other symbols on the clothing of the various members. As Fogelqvist notes, this is a reflection of Birgitta's "affective piety" urging the believer to be moved by a personal, passionate attachment to the humanity of Christ giving rise to strong feelings of joy and sorrow, wonder and

26 *RS* 11:120–121.

27 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 51v, p. 71).

28 Fogelqvist 1991, p. 221.

29 Fogelqvist 1991, p. 223.

30 *RS* 11:126–127.

31 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 52r, p. 72).

devotion, grief and lamentation.<sup>32</sup> For Birgitta herself, this is demonstrated in her visions of the Nativity, and even more in the detailed scenes of his Passion, especially the actual Crucifixion.<sup>33</sup>

After the sister has covered her head with the wimple, or veil, the bishop puts in the pin and prays that Christ will shade and refresh her soul so that “no noyous thynges” [“no hurtful things”] may disturb it.<sup>34</sup> Once this is done the bishop continues to pray that the Lord grant the nun spiritual light and wisdom so that “all erthly thyngys and tho thingys that be noyous to thi sowle” [“all earthly things and those things that are harmful to the soul”] become dead to her eyes in order that the path to heavenly things becomes “illumyned” [“illuminated”] so that she “may knowe hym that hath chosen [her]”.

In the 20th-century service at Syon, which adheres to the Rule of 1914 and was followed for the profession of Sister Anne Smyth in 1963, the presentation of the crown is preceded by “the ceremony of the pall”. For this, cushions are placed on the floor and after the nun has prostrated herself, she is covered with a pall on which flowers are strewn. The mass proceeds and the nun remains under the pall until the Pater Noster, after which the pall is removed and the nun rises and goes to the altar where the bishop crowns her. There is no exact counterpart to this in the medieval service, but after the crown and pin are in place, the nun prostrates herself while the bishop recites the litaney. In the actual rite of profession the Rule mentions the bier, “whiche with erthe cast vpon, must be sette tofore the dore tofore the begynnyng of the messe” [“which with earth scattered on it must be placed in front of the door before the beginning of the Mass”].<sup>35</sup> In both cases the constant reminder of death, which was a theme for Birgitta, is prominent. In Birgitta’s plans for the sisters’ part of the church, there are instructions for the bier to be placed by the door where it is visible to the nuns as they come and go to help them keep death in mind, and every day after terce, there is a ritual which takes place at the bier for which prayers are said for the dead and a pinch of earth is thrown

32 Fogelqvist 1991, p. 223.

33 For the Latin *Revelaciones*, see Bergh 1967, Book VII, Chs. 21 & 22, pp. 187–191 concerning the Nativity, and Ch. 15, pp. 164–168 for the Crucifixion; for an English translation, see Morris & Searby 2012, Book VII, Chs. 21 & 22, pp. 250–252 for the Nativity, and Ch. 15, pp. 234–238 for the Crucifixion.

34 Sister Anne Smyth, O.Ss.S., has commented: “the wimple and veil, in the original needed two pins, one for each item.”

35 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 53v, p. 73).

on the bier.<sup>36</sup> This service, as *The Myroure of oure Ladye* explains, was intended to help the community be ever mindful of death and the Last Judgement so that they could prepare themselves fittingly to be among those chosen to rise and live in everlasting joy.<sup>37</sup> In the ceremony of profession, the pall may also signify that the new nun has now become dead to the world.<sup>38</sup>

According to the medieval rite, the crown is placed over the veil of the nun at the point in the “spousale masse”<sup>39</sup> when the priest would turn to bless the husband and wife. As he places the crown over the veil of the new sister, the bishop prays that the Lord plant His sign in her and direct her will as she has vowed so that she will be “sekyr, stabyll and perseueraunte” [“sure, firm and steadfast”], and He in turn will crown her with the “crowne of myrthe aftir hys owne benigne wyll” [“crown of joy according to His own merciful will”]<sup>40</sup> so that her soul will be “onyde vndepartably” [“united inseparably”] to Him.<sup>41</sup> As he puts the pin in the crown, the bishop prays that Christ will prick her heart and her soul with His love so that it will fear “no pryckyngys of temptacione” [“no goading by temptation”].

It is at this point in the medieval service that the nun prostrates herself and the bishop recites the litany and absolves her sins. After the new nun takes communion,<sup>42</sup> four sisters open the door to the monastery and bring in the bier with earth cast on it which had been set by the door before the beginning of the mass. The bishop then approaches the door of the enclosure followed by the nun, who is preceded by two torches and accompanied by the singing of the *Veni creator spiritus*, and entrusts her to the abbess who is standing at the door with the rest of the community. The abbess is warned that if through her negligence, the nun should fall away, Christ will reclaim her. Therefore,

36 Referring to the prayers after terce each day at the bier, Sister Anne Smyth, O.Ss.S., wrote: “The prayers are first the ‘De profundis’, normally a prayer for the dead, but the Collect is for ourselves, gathered around the bier. It reads in part, in the 1914 edition, ‘we beseech Thee to keep our bodies clean and undefiled in Thy holy service, and order so our ways in this time, that when the great and dreadful day of doom cometh, our bodies may be raised amongst Thy Saints.’” See also *RS* 27.

37 Blunt 1873, pp. 142–143; *RS* 27:132.

38 I asked Sister Anne about this, and though she was not entirely sure, she thought that this must be the significance.

39 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 52v, p. 72).

40 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 53r, p. 73).

41 *RS* 11:135–136.

42 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 53v, p. 73).



she is enjoined to safeguard and keep the “deposid” [“deposit”] of God.<sup>43</sup> In response, the abbess admits that she has received a “grete tresoure” and that this will be “an harde labour” for which her strengths are not sufficient. Nevertheless, helped by his prayers and trusting in the help of God, she will do what he has commanded. The rite concluded, the new nun was led into the Chapter House. After eight days, she could take the last place in the choir and at table.

The modern service has one last item before the new nun is received by the lady abbess: the presentation of the breviary, thus stressing the importance of knowledge of the Canonical Hours and of reading the Office in Church. When Syon Abbey was founded, the collective performance of the Divine Office was an important feature of the Order, especially in the eyes of the reforming king at a time when private oratories tended to become more dominant.

## PART II. THE PERSONNEL

There is no available list of the identity of the 27 sisters, the five priests, the two deacons and the four lay brothers who were professed on 21 April 1420.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, since the community members are listed in the order of profession, the 1428 election list for the second confessor general, the first available list of members of the community at Syon, drawn up as it was on 30 September 1428 and electing Robert Bell confessor general after the death of Thomas Fishbourne, can be helpful.<sup>45</sup> At that time, there were 41 nuns, 14 more than at the time of enclosure, seven priests, two more than originally, only one deacon, rather than two, and six lay brothers, two more than at the enclosure. While this list can be a guide, we cannot be sure that there were no deaths or other changes in the intervening years. We do know, however, from a letter dated 3 May 1421 and sent by Richard Clifford, Bishop of London, to King Henry, who was with the English army in France, that “On Sunday, May 1st I was at your house of Syon and there confirmed the election of Joan North, abbess, and of Sir Thomas Fishbourne, my well-beloved cousin, confessor of your said house; and the

43 *Rewyll* 9 (fol. 54r, p. 74). Cf. 2 Timothy 1:14 “Bonum depositum custodi per Spiritum Sanctum, qui habitat in nobis.” [“You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” Jerusalem Bible].

44 Gejrot 2015, pp. 54–55 n. 80 points out that the Calendar fol. 5v cites the number of lay brothers as three, rather than four.

45 The list is preserved in MS 9531, part 5 (Gray), Guildhall Library, London Metropolitan Archives, fol. LXIX. I would like to thank the reader of this chapter for kindly providing this reference for me.

same day I blessed and stalled ["installed"] the aforesaid abbess ..."<sup>46</sup> Quoting from Chichele's *Pontifical*, F.R. Johnston gives the date as 5 May 1420. Numbers, of course, can be a notorious source of error, but certainly the year 1420 makes more sense since it is close to the date of the first professions.<sup>47</sup> Henry's biography in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* indicates that the king was back in England in the spring of 1421, but in 1420 he was in France, and since he was not able to attend the ceremony in person, 1420 must be correct.<sup>48</sup> Before Syon was enclosed, for legal purposes of the charter, the king had nominated Matilda Newton, a Benedictine nun of Barking Abbey, as abbess and William Alnewyk, an old Benedictine monk of St Albans who was living in a recluse cell at Westminster, as confessor general.<sup>49</sup> By the time of the first professions, however, they had retired and were no longer at Syon. It is thought that Joan North, who had been professed in 1409 at the Benedictine house of Markyate, a nunnery connected with St Albans, had been carefully selected by John Whethamstead, Abbot of St Albans and Syon's principal adviser in England,<sup>50</sup> and John Eyton, an Austin canon and Prior of St Bartholomew's in London. For the project to succeed, much depended on having an experienced abbess and confessor general.<sup>51</sup> Thomas Fishbourne had been a manorial steward before being ordained by Richard Clifford in 1408 and retiring to become a recluse at St Albans. He was extremely competent and, as it proved, a skilled diplomat, or as Elin Andersson has described him, "he appears in contemporary documents as an engaged and wise leader and as a man with important friends", and one might add well-placed relatives.<sup>52</sup> While at St Albans, he became the confessor to several aristocratic ladies, and in 1416 he was one of the king's confessors when he was appointed a trustee to take charge of the property of the alien priories. Fishbourne visited Rome on several occasions, two of which related to Syon Abbey. In 1418, he travelled to Rome to receive the Bull of Approval for Syon, and in 1423 he undertook the important task of leading a delegation to Rome to obtain a revocation of the Bull of Separation which had been issued in 1422. This bull would have removed

46 Cited in Fletcher 1933, p. 25.

47 Johnston 1996, p. 47 cites Chichele's *Pontifical* as found in the Surtees Society, 1873, p. xli. If indeed the day was Sunday, according to the Julian calendar, Johnston is correct, since 5 May 1420 was a Sunday.

48 Allmand 2010.

49 Fletcher 1933, p. 21.

50 Johnston 1996, p. 51.

51 Joan North died in 1433; Fishbourne died in 1428.

52 Andersson 2017, p. 95. Richard Clifford claimed him as his cousin. See also Gejrot 2015, pp. 28–29 of the *Martiloge* where it notes that the third office of the dead was originally for Fishbourne and describes some of his achievements.

the principle of the double monastery which was key to the original rule of the Order and, it was believed, divinely ordained, and so would have led to its demise, if not revoked. Sweden had also sent a delegation. While in Rome, Fishbourne observed the appropriate protocol and presented Pope Martin V and important members of the curia with gifts along with the *Informatio brevis*, a document setting out the reasons why the Bull of Separation would be disastrous and also making the point that the bull was based on invalid information, a tactic often used in such cases. In November 1423 the bull was revoked as applied to Syon, and the same year to the Nordic and Baltic countries. While there, Fishbourne revised the Bull of Privilege, the *Mare Magnum*, which resulted in Syon's own Bull of Privilege, the *Mare Anglicanum*, in 1425 giving Syon independence from Vadstena and granting Syon's wish to interpret the meaning and purpose of the Birgittine Rule as they understood the intention of its foundress to be.<sup>53</sup> Among the 18 volumes Fishbourne gave to the library of the brethren at Syon were two copies of the seven books of Birgitta's *Revelaciones*, indicating his interest in and devotion to St Birgitta. Accompanying Fishbourne in 1423 were two other members of the Syon community, Simon Winter, a priest brother, and a lay brother and secular priest, both of whom are on the 1428 election list for the next confessor general. It is likely that both were part of the original community in 1420. There are two lay brothers named Thomas on the 1428 list, but it is likely that the one who joined Fishbourne was Thomas London, who is listed in third place. Winter was an important figure at Syon. He was the owner of religious treatises as well as an author. Most well known is his *Life of St Jerome* which he compiled for Margaret, Duchess of Clarence.<sup>54</sup> Robert Bell seems to have become a member of the community after the brothers present in 1420, for in 1420 there were only five priests, and he is the seventh and last on the 1428 list. He must have had good credentials, however. Like Fishbourne, he was from the north, and like Fishbourne too, he seems to have been adept at diplomacy, for he was sent to Vadstena for discussions about the Rule. While there he made a copy of the *Acta et Processus Sanctae Birgittae*.

Among the nuns who must have been on the 1420 list are the four fully professed nuns from Sweden who, along with three "girls", came to help establish the new English house at the request of the king. In March or April of 1415 Henry had written to Vadstena with a formal request "to send over one brother and six of the older sisters from your monastery". Claes Gejrot has noted that in fact the "real number", as found in the *Diarium Vadstenense* and in Syon sources included four consecrated nuns, three

<sup>53</sup> See Andersson 2017, p. 100.

<sup>54</sup> See Waters 2008, pp. 1–68, 178–275.

girls, and two priest brothers.<sup>55</sup> Sources show that only the women remained in England: their names are all on the 1428 list, and their deaths were included in the Syon obituaries.<sup>56</sup> The four Swedish nuns appear first on the 1428 list as Cristina Swethe (Kristina Finvidsdotter), Ragnelle Titheca (Ragnhild Tidekesdotter), Anna Karilis (Anna Karlsdotter), and Cristina Isbiorna (Kristina Esbjörnsdotter).<sup>57</sup> They certainly had been professed the longest, and it seems likely that they were reconsecrated at Syon in 1420. Interestingly, two of the three girls are included among the first 27 nuns and appear as Margareta filia Johannis (Margareta Johansdotter) and Marina de Sweth (Marina Toresdotter). Margareta de Sweth (Margareta Finvidsdotter), the third, was placed 28th on the list. She was certainly present in 1420.<sup>58</sup> One may wonder about the status of the three “girls”. Since there is no mention of lay sisters, they must have been considered along with the nuns, or perhaps they became professed later. Among the nuns there are no members of the royal family, or their relatives at this time. On the other hand, the families of those who are listed often had some connection with the retinue of members of the royal family, or with the projects of the king or government. There were also siblings or perhaps cousins, such as Joan Fishbourne (and later Isabella Fishbourne), and three with the surname Sukelyng, including the Prioress Juliana Sukelyng.<sup>59</sup> While one gets a sense of a very close community dedicated to helping launch an important new foundation and to leading the king’s vision of religious reform through the guidance of St Birgitta, it would still be useful, nevertheless, to locate the list of 1420 which may well be lurking in an archive somewhere.

55 Gejrot 2017, p. 112. They left Vadstena sometime after Whitsun in 1415 and arrived at Bishop’s Lynn on 26 August.

56 Gejrot 2017, p. 120.

57 See Gejrot 2015, pp. 14–16 for descriptions of the training and background of the Swedish sisters. See also Gejrot 2017, pp. 109–127 for more general information about the Swedish sisters.

58 Virginia Bainbridge has suggested that she may have been too young in 1420 to have been professed (i.e., not yet 18), and this seems to be a likely situation (pers. comm.).

59 See Johnston 1996, Appendix, pp. 64–65.

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- PSF = *Poor Souls' Friend and St Joseph's Monitor*.
- Rewyll = *The Rewyll of Seynt Sauiore. The Middle English Translation of St Bridget's Regula Salvatoris*, see Miles 2005.
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EINAT KLAFTER

## Kempe's Roman Holiday

### *Elevating Poverty as a Form of Imitatio Birgittae*

Margery Kempe (1373–c. 1438), the lay-mystic pilgrim from Bishop's Lynn in East Anglia, arrived in Rome in August 1414 as part of her return journey from the Holy Land to England.<sup>1</sup> In her longest sojourn outside her homeland, Margery stayed there nearly nine months, leaving sometime after Easter 1415.<sup>2</sup> Kempe's autohagiographical text, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, produced in the mid-1430s, dedicates a considerable amount of attention to this episode, allocating twelve chapters (31–42) to Margery's visionary and mystical experiences in Rome, as well as to the people she encountered and the places she visited.<sup>3</sup> This is considerably longer than the space reserved to any other single location described in *The Book*.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ROME IN *THE BOOK OF MARGERY KEMPE*

The centrality of Rome within the text for Kempe is not surprising. Rome was an important and transformative episode in Margery's spiritual development, central to the pursuit of her vocation as a mystic-holy woman, and the site of several key events

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<sup>1</sup> Present-day King's Lynn.

<sup>2</sup> In my reading of *The Book of Margery Kempe* (British Library, Add MS 61823), I follow Lynn Staley's model of bifurcating Margery Kempe's name, as I find her distinction between "Margery, the protagonist/narrator, and Kempe her author", useful, and employ it throughout this paper. However, I do so divorced from Staley's theory of the authorship of *The Book*. Staley 1994, pp. 3, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Kieckhefer described *The Book* as an autohagiography. Kieckhefer 1984, p. 6.

in her life.<sup>4</sup> It was the location of her mystical marriage to the Godhead, officially marking her as a *sponsa Dei*;<sup>5</sup> it was where she was finally able to dress in virginal white as Christ had commanded her to do—despite being a mother of 14.<sup>6</sup> It was also where she connected with St Birgitta of Sweden, her main role model. In *The Book*, Kempe's textual subject, Margery, achieved this connection by adopting voluntary poverty, living among the poor of Rome, and performing charitable acts to aid the needy, as well as by visiting sites associated with Birgitta.<sup>7</sup> Through this two-fold *imitatio Birgittae*, she established herself as a holy woman, a divinely privileged living saint.<sup>8</sup>

Birgitta, a lay woman and mother, was crucial to the construction of Kempe's argument for her own sainthood, offering Kempe a model of sainthood open to married women and mothers living outside religious institutions. This importance, and more specifically Birgitta's influence on Kempe's narration of her transformative pilgrimage to Rome, has been discussed by scholars such as Hope Emily Allen, Julia Bolton Holloway, Naoë Yoshikawa, Sylvia Schein, and others.<sup>9</sup> However, their research considers Margery's transformation into a *sponsa Dei* as her main form of *imitatio Birgittae*, and examines Kempe's text primarily in relation to Birgitta's *Liber Celestis*. With few exceptions, such as the work of Kate Crassons and Sarah Salih, Margery's charitable acts

4 On Margery's pilgrimage to Rome and its centrality to Kempe's narrative and vocation, see, for example, Yoshikawa 2002; 2007; McIntyre 2008; Smith 2010; Howes 2014.

5 "... the Fadyr seyð to this creatur: 'Dowtyr, I wil han the weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn the my prevyteys and my cownselys, for thu schalt wonyn wyth me wythowtyn ende.'" ["The Father said to this creature: 'Daughter, I will have you wedded to my Godhead, for I shall show you my secrets and my counsels, for you shall dwell with me without end.'"]. Kempe 2004, p. 190 (lines 2816–2818). Margery marries the *Godhede* and not Christ, as was the traditional convention within the saintly texts and lives of female mystics, such as St Catherine of Siena and St Birgitta of Sweden.

6 "... clad al in white, liche as sche was comawndyd for to do yerys befor in hir sowle be revelacyon ..." ["clothed all in white as she was commanded to do years before in her should by revelation ..."]. Kempe 2004, p. 181, lines 2603–2605. White in clothing is meant to indicate the pure, chaste, and virginal status of its wearer. Margery's dressing in white clothing is a byproduct of her desire to both present herself as a chaste woman, what Lucas called a "performance of chastity", and a way to externally present to others her spiritual transformation and the changes that it had wrought within her, her revirginization in spirit, which some scholars have termed her singular gift of "spiritual virginity". Bosse 1984, p. 21; Cleve 1986, p. 163–167; Pellegrin 1999, pp. 1–3, 36, 46–47; Bowers 2000, pp. 21–22; Lucas 2019, pp. 43–44.

7 Spearing 2005, p. 36; 2012, p. 266; Lawton 2017, pp. 76–78.

8 Quotes and references to Birgitta's *Liber Celestis* and *vita* refer to the Middle English version, British Library MS Claudius B I, as this would reflect more accurately what Kempe would have known and been exposed to. Birgitta of Sweden 1987.

9 Holloway 1992; Cleve 1992; Wilson 1997; Schein 1999; Yoshikawa 2002.



and treatment of the poor in Rome are only briefly touched upon, and the *The Book's* unique account of poverty, begging, and charitable service in the city has been, for the most part, overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

This essay discusses how Margery's adoption of voluntary poverty, through the willing renunciation of material possessions and abandoning the comforts of her elite urban life, along with her interest in and care for the needy during her Roman sojourn, are uniquely place-specific and byproducts of Kempe's association of Rome with Birgitta.<sup>11</sup> Kempe fuses the two, and, in doing so, bypasses the traditional and well-established association of Rome with Sts Peter and Paul, and the early martyrs of the Church. It further explores how Kempe's approach to poverty in Rome and her atypical pilgrimage route can be read as aligning with Birgitta's views on locating and accessing the sanctity of Rome and as a way to establish Kempe's own claim to sanctity.

At a time when Birgitta's canonization was being debated at the Council of Constance,<sup>12</sup> Kempe put forth an argument, through her own pilgrimage account, in favour of Birgitta. She presented Rome as the city of Birgitta, in which the pious could connect with her and gain spiritual edification by walking in her footsteps. This is similar to how Jerusalem constituted the setting upon which the pious could connect with and recreate the historical narrative of Christ and his Passion.<sup>13</sup> For Kempe, Birgitta was to Rome as Jesus was to Jerusalem.

#### A NEGATIVE VIEW OF THE POOR AND BEGGING

The uniqueness of *The Book's* treatment of poverty in Rome becomes clear if we examine it in relation to the treatment of the disadvantaged elsewhere in the text. Outside the context of Rome, on the rare occasions *The Book* mentions the poor, it portrays them in a negative or ambivalent light. While Margery more than once found herself,

<sup>10</sup> Salih 2004; Crassons 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Margery Kempe first embraced voluntary poverty in Rome but continued to practise a mendicant lifestyle after leaving the Eternal City. While Kempe was not of noble birth, like Birgitta, she did come from a prominent mercantile family, with significant social clout, as she stated of herself, she "come of worthy kindred" ("sche was comyn of worthy kendred"). Her father, John Burnham (c. 1330–c. 1413), was a five-time town mayor and a Member of Parliament, and her brother, Robert Burnham (c. 1370–1421), was also a Member of Parliament and served as mayor three times. Her husband, while not as socially prominent, also hailed from a successful mercantile family. The money she inherited from her father enabled her pilgrimages abroad. It was also this fortune that she gave away when she embraced voluntary poverty and adopted a mendicant lifestyle. Kempe 2004, p. 57, line 265; Maddock 2021, pp. 164–168, 171.

<sup>12</sup> Watt 2004, pp. 145–146, 152; Lewis 2004, p. 213.

<sup>13</sup> Hoppenwasser 1992, p. 170.

personally, in need of financial assistance, primarily during her pilgrimages, she was not overly interested in the poverty of others, nor offered positive descriptions of the needy.<sup>14</sup> A good example of this negative portrayal is found in Margery's description of the "company of poor folk",<sup>15</sup> with whom she travelled to Aachen (Book II), after her original pilgrimage companions abandoned her:

So she was welcomed into a party of poor people, and when they arrived in any town she bought her food and her companions went about begging. When they were outside the towns, her companions took off their clothes and, sitting naked, picked at themselves. Need compelled her to wait with them and prolong her journey ... The creature was afraid to take off her clothes as did her companions, and therefore she, through mixing with them, got some of their parasites and she was bitten and stung most wickedly both day and night ... She kept with her party with great anguish and distress, and much difficulty, until the time that they reached Aachen.<sup>16</sup>

Margery's description of her experience and tone reflect her "great anguish and distress" as well as her feelings of disgust toward her fellow pilgrims, whose company she kept only out of pure necessity. This was despite the fact that on the whole these companions treated her very well, as one of their own, and much better than other pilgrimage parties with whom she had previously travelled.<sup>17</sup> Throughout her account of this episode, she set herself apart from her companions, and considered them unworthy of even an act of charity, as she seemingly did not share the food she bought for herself and left them to beg for sustenance. She also blamed "mixing with them" for her contracting lice, rather than her own reluctance to disrobe in public and clean herself like her companions.

This negative tone toward poverty is found in other places throughout *The Book* and may be connected to the fact that in late medieval England poverty and begging

14 On *The Book's* complicated relationship with questions of poverty, see, for example, Cullum 2004; Salih 2004; Crassons 2010.

15 Kempe 2004, p. 406 (line 7978). Where modern English translations are given in the text to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, unless otherwise noted, they are taken from Kempe 2015. Middle English quotes are taken from Kempe 2004.

16 Kempe 2015, p. 215. Middle English: "... sche was receyvyd into a company of powr folke, and whan thei comyn to any towne, sche bowte hir mete and hir felaschep went on beggyng. Whan thei wer wythowtyn the townys, hir felaschep dedyn of her clothys, and sitting nakyd, pykyd hem. Nede compellyd hir to abydyn hem and prolongyn hir jurné and ben at meche mor cost than sche schulde ellys a ben. Thys creatur was abavyd to putte of hir clothis as hyr felawys dedyn, and therfor sche thorw hir comownyng had part of her vermyn and was betyn and stongyn ful evyl bothe day and nyght tyl God sent hir other felaschep." Kempe 2004, p. 407 (lines 7983–7992).

17 Crassons 2010, pp. 211–212.

had become charged subjects. During Kempe's lifetime, English attitudes to charity and the poor were not always positive, despite the centrality of charity to Christian piety, and some even considered the poor to be "... a threatening and even deceitful group best treated with suspicion."<sup>18</sup> Giving alms to the local poor, who were known to be virtuous and truly in need, was the preferred form of charity. Trusting strangers to be rightfully deserving of help was frowned upon, even viewed as gullibility that left one open to fraud.<sup>19</sup> This cultural shift in England included the passing of laws, by the secular authorities, that criminalized able-bodied begging and indiscriminate charity. In this context, labour became a sign of virtue and poverty an indicator and byproduct of idleness and other associated sins.<sup>20</sup> The anxieties over the fine line between beggars and criminals who were seen as taking advantage of the foolishly charitable are also at the centre of Kempe's account of criminal able-bodied begging in which her scribe was swindled by a young man fraudulently presenting himself as being in need of financial assistance (chapter 24).<sup>21</sup> *The Book* thus aligned with the reproaching of able-bodied begging and charity to strangers claiming need, while supporting the giving of alms to the destitute neighbours that Margery knew and trusted to be in need of charity.<sup>22</sup>

#### PRIVILEGING THE POOR OF ROME

The notable exception to *The Book's* generally negative stance toward poverty, and particularly of charity to strangers, is found in Margery's pilgrimage to Rome, which Crassons describes as presenting "an especially concentrated portrait of poverty".<sup>23</sup> Lynn Staley portrays Margery's experience and account of Rome as providing "... a special perspective upon the city that was the centre of Christendom, peopling it with poor men and women, with beggars, with those in need of brotherly love that can be very hard to find."<sup>24</sup> In Rome, both her own voluntary poverty and the involuntary poverty of others constituted important components of Margery's experience, and

18 Cullum 2004, p. 177.

19 Rubin 1994, p. 178.

20 Rubin 1994; Cullum 2004; Crassons 2010, pp. 6–7, 145, 178–179; Davis 2014, p. 938.

21 Kempe 2004, pp. 142–146 (lines 1776–1839); Cullum 2004, p. 188.

22 Cullum 2004, p. 188; Crassons 2010, pp. 5–6; as well as Fitzgibbons 2008; Rubin 1994.

23 Crassons 2010, p. 184.

24 Staley 1994, p. 74.

were framed in a positive light.<sup>25</sup> It is through poverty that she located, reaffirmed, and connected with the sanctity of Rome:

... Christ said to the creature, "This place is holy." And then she got up and went out into Rome and saw much poverty amongst the people; and then she thanked God highly for the poverty that she was in, trusting to partake in merit with them.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, Rome was also the only place where Margery mentioned encountering the needy as an urban and everyday phenomenon, even though she did not need to travel beyond Bishop's Lynn to meet and embrace the poor. This positive view and awareness of poverty was reserved for her Roman sojourn. It is possible that this is because Rome was where Kempe learned of continental practices of charity, what P.H. Cullum called "heroic acts of charity", which included embracing poverty and actively serving the poor through extreme almsgiving and begging on their behalf.<sup>27</sup> This form of charity was practised in Rome by holy women, such as Birgitta and St Frances of Rome (1384–1440). The latter was a lay married woman and a contemporary of Kempe renowned for her acts of charity and service to the poor, which included begging on their behalf. While she is not mentioned in *The Book*, she was actively engaged in public charitable service to the poor in Rome during Margery's stay in the city, including begging for them.<sup>28</sup> However, this was not a new and lingering *habitus* that Margery took with her when she departed from Rome, as evidenced by her distaste for her destitute travelling companions in her later pilgrimage to Aachen.

Rome was also the only place in which Kempe described Margery as begging for food and other supplies, both for others and herself. While she found herself in need in other places as well, due to her adoption of voluntary poverty, her destitution was

25 Voluntary poverty, broadly defined within the context relevant to both Kempe and Birgitta, is the willing renunciation of goods, which include giving away of one's possessions and denouncing claims to ownership of goods. It is a product of Franciscan influence at play on the devotional practices of these holy women, and part of the Franciscan ideal of voluntary poverty is the annihilation of the will to possess, claim, or manage goods, and the renunciation of the will to wield dominion. Crassons 2010, pp. 6–7, 145, 178, 202–203; Brodman 2009, p. 19.

26 Kempe 2015, p. 86. Middle English: "... Jesus Crist seyde to the creatur: 'Thys place is holy.' And than sche ros up and went forth in Rome and sey meche poverté among the pepyl. And than sche thankyd God hily of the poverté that sche was in, ttrustyng herthorw to be partynyr wyth heem in meryte". Kempe 2004, p. 202 (lines 3092–3094).

27 Cullum 2004, p. 186; Brodman 2009, pp. 179–183.

28 St Frances of Rome was a Roman holy woman, wife, and mother of three, who pursued her religious vocation while her husband was still alive. This is similar to what we find in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Fullerton 1855.

generally alleviated by others who offered to give her material assistance without the need to be prompted to do so as a sign of their belief in her sanctity.

#### PERFORMING THE PILGRIMAGE TO ROME VIA BIRGITTA

Traditionally, a pilgrimage to Rome did not entail simply spending time within the Eternal City. This act of piety was performed by following a set circuit of papal churches and sacred sites, mapped out in indulgence guides such as the Middle English poem the *Stations of Rome* (*The Stacyons of Rome*), that listed where pilgrims should offer their devotion and enumerated the amount of indulgences they could receive at each place.<sup>29</sup> A close reading of Kempe's account of Margery's pilgrimage through Rome, and her experiences of the divine in the Eternal City, shows that she was able to access the spiritual benefits of Rome without performing the set pilgrimage circuit through the city. This was very much in contrast to Margery's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, immediately preceding the trip to Rome, where she strictly followed the set route guided by the Franciscan Friars of the *Custodia Terrae Sanctae*, detailing her experiences at the different stations to which her group was led. Conversely, Kempe's account of Rome is bereft of relics, indulgences, and papal churches, but is densely populated with the destitute people Margery encountered and interacted with, as well as the legacy of Birgitta, who spent the last 23 years of her life in the city, from 1350 to 1373 (the year Kempe was born).

The exceptional status given to the Eternal City's most destitute people begs the question of what is so special about the poor of Rome. I argue that this is a byproduct of Kempe's conflation of Rome with the figure of Birgitta, whose *vita* lists her voluntary poverty, charitable acts, and care for the poor among her important and unique character traits:

She greatly loved voluntary poverty so much that all that she had she placed in other men's hands, and when she needed something for herself or another, she would meekly ask for it in the name of Jesus Christ ... Often when she had great need, she would beg for another who did not have as great a need as herself.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous 1867; Hulbert 1923, p. 403; Goodman 2002, pp. 195–197.

<sup>30</sup> Modern translation my own. Middle English: "Sho loued so greteli wilfull pouert þat all þat sho hade, sho put it into opir mennes hands, and when sho wald haue oght to hirselfe or to ani opir, sjo suld aske it mekeli in þe the name of Iesu Criste ... Oftt times when sho had full gret need, sho wald aske for opir þat had noght so grete need as sho had hirselfe." Birgitta of Sweden 1987, p. 4.

Kempe was well acquainted with both Birgitta's revelations and *vita*, as she recounted that "Bridis boke" was read to Margery by a priest along with other devotional texts over a period of some seven years.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Kempe would have been familiar with Birgitta and her texts through the popularity that Birgitta enjoyed in England at the time, and the clerical circles she inhabited, which included her spiritual advisor Alan of Lynn (c. 1348–c. 1423), a Carmelite anchorite who indexed Birgitta's revelations.<sup>32</sup>

Looking at Kempe's pilgrimage through Rome in relation to Birgitta can explain the unique role of poverty in Rome, as well as her lack of references to the indulgences that the city offered. Effectively, Kempe put forth an alternative Roman pilgrimage route that highlighted Birgitta's link to the city. For instance, of the five churches and monuments of Rome that *The Book* mentions by name, three had a strong and documented connection to Birgitta:<sup>33</sup> San Giovanni in Laterano, the Casa di Santa Brigida, and Santa Maria Maggiore. In San Giovanni, Birgitta had been witnessed levitating.<sup>34</sup> Santa Maria Maggiore was of particular importance to Birgitta and was the site of a vision of Mary warning her of the moral decay of the Church.<sup>35</sup> While we are not offered details regarding the route that Margery took through Rome, it is likely that on her way to Santa Maria Maggiore she would have passed through Via Panisperna, where Birgitta sat begging for food and where her body was briefly entombed (at San Lorenzo in Panisperna) before making the long journey to Vadstena.<sup>36</sup> In Rome, Margery loosely followed Birgitta's *Liber Celestis* and her *vita* rather than the more traditional footsteps of Peter and Paul.

In terms of how Kempe maps out the sacred geography of Rome in her text, the Birgitta-centric nature of Margery's pilgrimage can mainly be gleaned from the only

31 Kempe mentions both Birgitta and her text several times throughout *The Book*, for example: "... red to hir many a good boke of hy contemplacyon and other bokys, as the Bybyl wyth doctowrys thereupon, Seynt Brydys boke, Hyltons boke, Boneventur, *Stimulus Amoris*, *Incendium Amoris*, and swech other." Kempe 2004, p. 280 (lines 4817–4821). It is safe to assume that Kempe would have been familiar with Birgitta's account of Rome, as translations of both the *Liber Celestis* and her *vita* were known in England as early as 1391, if not earlier. Atkinson 1983, p. 35; Cleve 1992, p. 164; Hutchison 2009, pp. 270–271, 280, 284.

32 McAvoy & Yoshikawa 2021, p. 47.

33 The following churches are specifically mentioned by name: San Giovanni in Laterano, Santa Apostoli, San Marcello, Casa di Santa Brigida, Santa Maria Maggiore. Santa Caterina della Ruota is not mentioned by name, but simply described as the church opposite the hospice of St Thomas of Canterbury. Kempe 2004, pp. 182, 184, 189, 199, 203–204, 210.

34 Birgitta of Sweden 1987, p. 5; Kempe 2004, p. 184.

35 Birgitta of Sweden 1987, pp. 209–210; Kempe 2004, p. 210; Morris & Searby 2006, pp. 255, 275; Zweig 2019, p. 149.

36 Zweig 2019, pp. 155–156.

religious structure described in any detail in Kempe's account of Rome: the Chapel of St Birgitta (Casa di Santa Brigida)—the saint's former abode in the Eternal City. Margery visited the site in hopes of getting closer to and learning more about Birgitta. While there she sought out people who knew the saint and could speak of her:

... this creature spoke with St Birgitta's maidservant in Rome ... the maidservant said that her mistress, St Birgitta, was kind and meek to every creature, and that she had a smiling face. And also, the good man where this creature had been lodging told her that he had known St Birgitta herself, but he little knew that she had been as holy a woman as she was, as she was always intimate with and kind to all creatures that wished to speak with her. She was in the room in which St Birgitta died, and heard there a German priest preaching about her, about her revelations and her manner of living. And she also knelt on the stone on which our Lord appeared to St Birgitta and told her on what day she should die. And it was on one of St Birgitta's days<sup>37</sup> that this creature was in her chapel, which before had been the room in which she died.<sup>38</sup>

This passage is unique within the text's account of her experiences in Rome. The level of detail in describing the place and Margery's experience there stands out even when compared to her descriptive account of other sites of the Holy Land or Rome itself. No other place, no other interior space, is described in such detail—or any detail at all. For example, the location of Margery's mystical marriage to the Godhead, The Church of the Holy Apostles ("the Postelys Cherch"),<sup>39</sup> is only mentioned by name.

37 This would have either been 8 October, the feast of Birgitta's canonization and translation, or 23 July, Birgitta's feast day. Kempe 2015, p. 250.

38 Kempe 2015, p. 87. Middle English: "... this creatur spak wyth Seynt Brydys mayden in Rome, but sche couwd not undirstondyn what sche seyde. Than had sche a man that cowed undirstondyn hir langage, and that an tolde Seynt Bryrigpty's mayden what this creatur seyde and how sche askyd after Seynt Brigyt, hir lady. Than the mayden seyde that hir lady, Seynt Brigyt, was goodly and meke to every creatur, and that sche had a lawhyng cher. And also the good man wher this creature was at hoste telde hir that he knew hir hys own selfe, but he wend lityl that sche had ben so holy a woman as sche was, for sche was evyr homly and goodly to alle creatury's that woldyn spekyn wyth hir. Sche was in the chawmbre that Seynt Brigyt deyde in, and herd a Dewsche preste prechyn of hir therin, and of hir revalacyons and of hir maner of levying, and sche knelyd also on the ston on the which our Lord aperyd to Seynt Brigyte and telde hir what day sche schuld deyn on. And this was on of Seynt Brigyts days that the creatur was in hir chapel, which befortyme was hir chawmbre that sche deyde in." Kempe 2004, p. 204 (lines 3118–3135).

39 Kempe 2004, p. 189 (line 2810).

## THE WEATHER IN ROME AS A SANCTIFICATION AID

While Margery was visiting Birgitta's chapel, "the room in which she died", on one of her feast days, Rome was hit with a storm so fierce that "... those who were in the fields and at work outdoors were forced to enter houses to protect their bodies, to avoid various dangers." God revealed to Margery that he had sent the storm as a sign that he "... wanted His holy saints' days to be held sacred, and that the saint was to be worshipped more than she was at that time."<sup>40</sup> According to Kempe's account, God, through this storm, was expressing displeasure over the seemingly insufficient level of worship granted to Birgitta and was correcting their error by forcing the people of Rome to refrain from work and take heed of his saint's holy day. In recounting this revelation, Margery bore witness to Birgitta's sanctity and the efficacy of her cult of devotion, at a time when this was being questioned at the Council of Constance.<sup>41</sup> This witnessing of Birgitta's saintliness also served Kempe's own agenda and argument for her own sanctity. In reaffirming Birgitta's status, through her experiencing of divine revelations, both auditory and atmospheric, she was actually arguing for and demonstrating her own divine privilege and sanctity, evidenced by her *auctoritas*, her access to divine truth and prophetic knowledge that others lacked. Mystical and hagiographical texts often contain references meant to prove the sanctity of prior holy persons as a means of attesting to the sanctity of the aspiring saint.<sup>42</sup>

This is not the only time that atmospheric forces are used by Kempe as prophetic signs in Rome. In fact, storms and extreme weather conditions formed another obstacle to Margery's undertaking of the "Stations of Rome", the set circuit of churches that pilgrims were meant to visit to achieve their pilgrimage to Rome and collect the indulgences that the sacred city had to offer. Margery was warned by God at night that "she should not leave her hostel, for that day He should send great storms and thunder and lightning." This was repeated several times, and Margery recounts that "there were such great storms that year ... that very old men then living in Rome said that they

40 Kempe 2015, pp. 87–88. Middle English: "... this was on of Seynt Brigypts days that tthis creatur was in hir chapel, which befortyme was hir chawmbre that sche deyde in. Owr Lord sent swech tempest of wyndys and reynes, and dyvers impressyons of eyrs, that thei that wer in the feldys and in her labowrys wythowtynforth wer compellyd to entyr howsys in socowryng of her bodiis, to enchewyn dyvers perellys. Throw swech tokeyns this creatur supposyd that owr Lord wold hys holy seyntys day schulde ben halwyd, and the seyntt had in mor worship than sche was at that tyme". Kempe 2004, pp. 204–205 (lines 3133–3141).

41 Cleve 1992, pp. 168–169; Klafter 2019, p. 134.

42 Oen 2021, pp. 247, 263; Klafter 2019.



had never seen the like before.”<sup>43</sup> Taking this divine interaction into account, it would not be possible to simply speculate that Kempe merely refrained from mentioning Margery’s following the traditional pilgrimage tour of papal churches and holy relics. Rather, she was explicitly prevented from doing so by divine intervention. As a result, Kempe constructed an alternative pilgrimage route through which she connected with the sanctity of Rome, achieved through divine guidance, just as the storm during her visit to Birgitta’s tomb pointed to her support for and connection to Birgitta.

### VOLUNTARY POVERTY AND SANCTIFYING THE MUNDANE IN ROME

In addition to focusing mainly on the physical locations connected to Birgitta, Margery emulated her behaviour, including her vow of voluntary poverty (“wilfull pouert”), which entailed giving away her possessions and begging for the sake of others.<sup>44</sup> In a similar manner, Margery took on the hardships of destitution, giving away all her money, and making herself dependent on the kindness of strangers.

Like Birgitta, Margery also lived among the poor, and as an act of charity and penance took on the role of a servant to a destitute, elderly woman. Her service included manual labour, offering the woman supplies, and begging for food for her:

... her confessor, charged her, by virtue of obedience, and also in part out of penance, to serve an old woman of Rome, a poor creature ... She served her as she would have done our Lady. And she had no bed to lie in, and no bedclothes to be covered with, except her own cloak. And then she was full of parasites and suffered much pain from them. Also, she fetched home water and sticks on her shoulders for the poor woman, and begged for both food and wine for her ...<sup>45</sup>

In her service to the impoverished woman, Margery calls to mind Birgitta’s care for the sick and poor, which included doing manual labour, such as mending their clothing,

43 Kempe 2015, p. 88. The storms subsided after people requested Margery to pray for them that the storms would abate.

44 “Sho loued so greteli wilfull pouert þat all þat sho hade, sho put it into opir mennes hands, and when sho wald haue oght to hirselfe or to ani opir, sho suld aske it mekeli in þe name of Iesu Criste, als it had neur bene hir awen”, Birgitta of Sweden 1987, p. 4.

45 Kempe 2015, p. 79. Middle English: “... Schulde servyn an hold woman that was a poure creatur in Rome. And sche dede so sex wekys. Sche servyd hir as sche wolde a don owyr Lady. And sche had no bed to lyn in, ne no clothys to be cured wyth, saf hir own mentyl. And than was sche ful of vermyn and suffyrd gret peyn therwyth. Also sche fet hom watyr abd stykys in her nekke for the poure woman and beggyd mete and wyn bothyn for hir. And when the pour womans wyn was sowr, this creatur himself drank that sowr wyn, and yaf the powr woman good wyn that sche had bowt for hir owyn selfe”. Kempe 2004, p. 189 (lines 2800–2809).

and begging for alms for others next to San Lorenzo in Panisperna.<sup>46</sup>

While Margery's service was not a voluntary or enjoyable act, she accepted it and recognized the spiritual benefits of the exercise, as well as the practical need to complete it successfully in order to establish her standing with her Roman confessor and ensure his continued support. Here the "vermyne" and parasites are described matter-of-factly, as part of the physical component of her penance, and do not carry the scorn found later on in the text in the account of the Aachen pilgrims. Kempe even likens Margery's service to the old woman to her care of the Virgin Mary, recalling the meditative visions early in her conversion.<sup>47</sup>

The care for the poor becomes part of the performance of a devotional exercise, a means to an end. It is both how she practises her devotion and achieves her pilgrimage to Rome, and how she publicly demonstrates her piety and sanctity, part of her argument for sainthood and her attempt to build a cult and community around herself. It transforms the people, and especially the poor of Rome, into alternative artefacts, stations on a self-established, unofficial pilgrimage route through the city. They replace the Church-appointed relics and places that the pious traditionally employed to connect with the sanctity of Rome. However, they are not mere alternatives. By being freely available and accessible—the streets were full of people, including the poor—they enabled Margery to access the divine without intervention or mediation, without the need to travel to a specific location, or at a specific time.

In transforming the urban cityscape of Rome, as a whole, into a *loca sancta*, Kempe treats the Eternal City in a manner that recalls Jerusalem, where the city streets were also hallowed ground, as they enabled the pious to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and to follow him through his life and Passion. Moreover, the spiritual experiences brought on by the contact with the people of Rome were as powerful as those triggered by the more institutionalized sites of the Holy Land:

... when she saw women of Rome carrying children in their arms, if she knew for a fact that any of them were little boys, she would cry out, roar, and weep, as if she had seen Christ in His childhood ... And if she saw a handsome man, it caused her great pain to look at him, in case she might see He who is both God and man. Therefore, she often cried many times when she met a handsome man and wept and sobbed most dreadfully for Christ's manhood as she went about the streets

46 "She was of so grete & meruaylous mekenes that oft tymes she sat vnknownen with pore pylgrimes at the monastery of seynt Laurence in pampersna in the cyte of Rome which is of the orde of seynt Clare & there she toke almes with them / Oft tymes with hir owne handes for goddes sake she repayred the clothes of pore men / & euery day in hir husbandes lyf she fedde xii pore men in hir house seruyd & mynystred to them hir selfe suche as they neded." Gascoigne 1873, pp. lii–liiii.

47 Kempe 2015, pp. 75–80.

of Rome, so that those who saw her were really astonished by her, because they did not know the cause of this.<sup>48</sup>

In this example, Margery's visions of Christ and Mary were triggered by even the slightest gaze at the handsome men and mothers of Rome and were so powerful that she was forced to avert her eyes. This can also be read as another example of her *imitatio Birgittae*, as Margery physically mirrored Birgitta's habit of walking through the streets with her gaze downcast to avoid looking at people's faces and interacting with them. This is a detail that Margery would have gleaned from the Middle English version of Birgitta's *vita*, which described how:

She often visited with great travail the holy places in Rome, and she thought it right that she should speak no words to anyone while doing this ... guarded her vision that she looked at very few people's faces, and if she liked anything in what she saw, she took note to confess it later ...<sup>49</sup>

Walking through the streets of Rome with her gaze averted trying not to look at the faces of the men she passes, Margery moved through the city not merely in the footsteps of Birgitta, but also walked through them in the same manner.

Margery's sanctification of the mundane in the streets of Rome can also be linked to Birgitta's views or visionary insight regarding the holiness of the city itself. Birgitta was repeatedly informed by God that it was the land itself, containing the blood and bones of Christian martyrs, that made the city holy, beyond the specific churches and relics it housed.<sup>50</sup> This was also part of her argument for the return of the pope to Rome, because linking the city's sanctity to the physical presence of the martyrs' blood and bones in its soil meant it could not be exported to or reconstructed in Avignon, through the architecture of the papal palace.

Kempe's visionary experiences in the streets were therefore not only an exercise of *imitatio Birgittae* or an alternative means to access the spiritual benefits of Rome that she offered her readers. They were yet an additional authentication of her role model's

48 Kempe 2015, p. 80. Middle English: "Whan sche sey women in Rome beryn children in her armys, yyf sche myth wetyn that thei wer ony men children, sche shuld than cryin, roryn and wepyn as thei sche had seyn Crist in hys childhode ... And yyf sche sey a semly man, sche had gret peyn to lokyn on hym, les than sche myth a seyn hym that was bothe God and man. And therfor sche cryed many tymes and oftyn whan she met a semly man, and wept and sobbyd ful sor in the manhood of Crist as sche went in the stretys at Rome, that thei that seyn hir wondryd ful mych on hir, for thei knew not the cawse". Kempe 2004, pp. 190–191 (lines 2823–2835).

49 Birgitta of Sweden 1987, p. 4.

50 See, for example, III.27 and IV.33. Birgitta of Sweden 1987, pp. 236–239, 284–287; Morris & Searby 2006, pp. 311–314; 2008, pp. 78–82.

authority, in this case of her views on the source and pervasiveness of the city's sanctity, as well as an indirect affirmation, again, of her own divine privilege.<sup>51</sup> This reciprocal recognition is highlighted by the fact that in Rome, Margery was embraced by people who knew Birgitta and supported her cult, a lay-Birgittine community that also accepted Margery's own claims to sanctity (chapter 38).<sup>52</sup>

Finally, beyond the Casa di Santa Brigida, the city did not offer Kempe any sites specifically associated with the saint. Kempe, by mining Birgitta's *vita* and revelations, created almost ex nihilo an alternative route through Rome that enabled her to connect with her role model and walk in her footsteps. Thus, she transformed the streets of the city into her pilgrimage sites. Those streets became one massive Via Dolorosa, in which Kempe traced an atypical pilgrimage route on the trail of Birgitta. In doing so, Kempe remapped the sacred geography of Rome and created a unique female-authored and female-focused devotional experience of the city, for herself and her pious followers.

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51 The validation of Birgitta's visions has its greatest expression in the Rome pilgrimage, but is found throughout *The Book*, for example where Christ offers Margery a vision of the Eucharist and uses this to prove that Birgitta had also been privileged by divinely gifted visions, in chapter 20. Kempe 2004, pp. 129–130 (lines 1512–1531).

52 Kempe 2004, pp. 199–201; Klafter 2019; Bale & Giosuè 2021.

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DAVID CARRILLO-RANGEL

# Performing Heavenly Delights in Medieval Barcelona

## *Circulation of Birgittine Texts and Affective Communities*

Birgittine historiography has been and still is too dependent on knowledge-production infrastructures based on contemporary borders, both national and linguistic, omitting the fact that Latin was a transnational language and tool for communication for both ecclesiastical power structures and devotional culture.<sup>1</sup> The assumption that the laity was illiterate and unable to understand Latin should be revised. First, it is simply common sense that people who attended mass in Latin would at some point over a lifetime become familiar with the language, and secondly because there is evidence of Latin books in lay hands in inventories, wills, and other documents.<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting here that owners of such books would have been part of the elites, but I want to emphasize that the term elite not only refers to the aristocracy but also to a new emergent merchant bourgeois class that developed in tandem with the urban environments, a development crucial for late medieval spirituality. Perhaps the lack of interest for this new merchant bourgeois class is the reason why the reception of Birgittine texts in the kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula has not received proper attention by the scholarly community studying the devotional and religious culture of the Late Middle Ages. Nevertheless, the absence of vernacular translations does not really explain this lack of interest.<sup>3</sup> There has certainly been a lack of attention given to Birgitta of Sweden among Spanish historians, possibly for the lack of interest in Latin works, in addition

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1 There is a long bibliography on the relation between nationalist ideas and history; for a good introduction see Breuilly 2013. For a specific medieval reflection on this, see Symes 2011.

2 Especially relevant for this essay: Hernando i Delgado 1995; Iglesias Fonseca 1996.

3 For late vernacular translations, see below.

to the fact that “female spirituality” has been considered a minor topic.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I will highlight traces of circulated manuscripts and references to Birgitta’s authority as an accepted symbol, used to protect communities that were scrutinized due their unorthodoxy, something that has not been sufficiently researched nor acknowledged.

However, the general assumption that Birgitta of Sweden was neither influential nor known in Spain dominates the secondary literature. This assumption is problematic, not only due to the evidence stated above, but also because Spain as a country did not exist at the time; however, Castille and the Crown of Aragon, or what can be considered the Peninsular Kingdoms, did. I will use the term Peninsular Kingdoms rather than Spain in this essay to include all the territories discussed: Portugal, Castille, and the Crown of Aragon. If I am discussing a particular source in a particular territory, I will address it in the context of the period. It is noteworthy that the Crown of Aragon included some Italian territories in the 14th century. Perhaps one of the reasons for this lack of scholarly study of the Spanish sources is the methodological assumption of assessing Birgitta’s influence according to the monastic foundations of the Birgittine Order around Europe. One of the aims of the visions that she had was to establish a new double monastic order, which was approved shortly after her death.<sup>5</sup> These monasteries became centres of dissemination of the *Liber Celestis* (LC), though not exclusively.<sup>6</sup> Hans Cnatingius attributes the absence of Birgittine monasteries in “Spain” to the adscription of “this country” to the Avignon observance during the Great Schism, although he comments extensively on the attempt to found a Birgit-

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4 And in some way, it still is, except for some scholars like Blanca Garí, Victoria Cirlot, Maria del Mar Graña Cid, Milagros Rivera, Rebeca San Martín, Pablo Acosta García, Mercedes Pérez-Vidal, Delfi I. Nieto-Isabel and Sergi Sancho-Fibla, among others. The pioneering work is Cirlot & Garí 2020.

5 The term “double monastery” is problematic; see Nyberg 2017.

6 I am not going to refer to Birgitta as a saint in this essay, even if the normative English translation bears the title *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden*. “Saint” implies a political positioning, which is influential in the way Birgitta and her visions are researched, as orthodox, with a guarantee of orthodoxy, regulated religion, and so forth. Her visions were called into question several times. I will refer to this text as *Liber Celestis* (hereafter LC), the name used at the time of its production and dissemination until the Council of Basel (1431–1449) forbade both it being called such and the circulation of the text without theologians’ commentaries. My choice here is a challenge to the limitations and the normativization that this prohibition supposes, for example, limiting feminist or queer interpretations of Birgitta’s life and visions from a superficial standpoint that confuses saint with orthodoxy, or pious woman with an expanding category through which construct authority.

tine monastery in Valencia, and mentions other instances of devotion to Birgitta in the Peninsular Kingdoms.<sup>7</sup>

Latin manuscripts containing Birgittine works circulated in the Peninsular Kingdoms in the Middle Ages, and they were possibly copied there as well, but this matter has hitherto not received much attention by scholars.<sup>8</sup> Cynthia Robinson does note a manuscript at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (BNE) and correctly places it in the Crown of Aragon, but dismisses it as an object of analysis because it is in Latin and the focus of her research is on Castille, concluding: “If Castilians had wanted Bridget’s prayers, they could very easily have obtained them. The conclusion must be, therefore, that they did not.” She makes this assumption because that is the only manuscript at the BNE, and she does not take into consideration printed material. Furthermore, she does not mention a Spanish translation of Birgitta’s *vita*, and some revelations compiled in the 16th century which are also available at the BNE, nor does she mention materials in other libraries and archives.<sup>9</sup>

There are several traces of the importance of the reception of Birgitta of Sweden in the Peninsular Kingdoms, but this paper will focus specifically on medieval Barcelona for the variety of sources involved. I use the term “Birgitta of Sweden” and not the *LC*, or her works, to include other means of knowledge and devotion such as personal contact, relics, reputation, images, etc. These entanglements create communities or circles beyond the concepts of network, textual communities, or emotional communities, which I define as “affective communities”, in which the intensive force that brings together the becoming of different persons has to do with the way they touch within a

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7 Cnattingius 1963, pp. 42–46.

8 Bridget Morris and Veronica O’Mara do not mention any Spanish translation or the circulation of Latin manuscripts, even if they rely on a personal communication with Ronald E. Surtz (Morris & O’Mara 2000, p. 18, n. 1); also Maria H. Oen does not mention the Peninsular Kingdoms and the political role played by Alfonso of Jaén in her introduction to *A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden* (2019). A proper reading of the politics of the Crown of Aragon at the time regarding the papacy is absent in the contributions of Unn Falkeid and Anna Fredriksson that focus on politics and power, Falkeid 2019; Fredriksson 2019.

9 Robinson 2013, p. 118. There are several copies of incunabula of ‘The Fifteen Oes’ in some of the volumes attributed to Birgitta at the BNE. A Spanish translation from the end of the 16th century is found in Madrid, BNE, MSS/19625. It is worth noticing that on the title page, the work is attributed to Martín Carrillo (1561–1630), but it is unclear if he has made the translation, or if he is using a previous one. The manuscript that Robinson mentions is Madrid, BNE, MSS/4444, but she does not identify it properly, see below.

particular construct.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this essay, “construct” refers to the myriad of traces that make accessible and knowledgeable a person linked with ideas, devotions, or texts. In other words, and always in the context of this essay, I am referring to the constellation of objects and their recorded uses that make the idea of the influence of Birgitta of Sweden possible. In the following pages, I will pin these objects to the physical and emotional map of medieval Barcelona, by describing them, by providing some context, and by analysing their uses.

### BOOKS KNOWN ONLY BY TITLE, OR INCIPIT, OR COVER ...<sup>11</sup>

The first pin that I place on the map of Barcelona is that of the Church of Santa Maria del Pi, which is still standing in what is today known as the gothic quarter. The priest of this church was also a master of arts and theology, and a canon of La Seu d’Urgell Cathedral, seat of the Bishop of Urgell and an important centre of knowledge and power in the Crown of Aragon. His name was Felip de Malla (1370–1431) and the inventory of his books, dated possibly to the first half of the 15th century, mentions “Sancta Brigida”, that is, Birgitta of Sweden:

Item,. I. libre gran, scrit de letre avinyonencha, en paper, ab los caps de querns de pergami, a .II. colondells, ab les posts cubertes de cuyr negre ras, ab.III. gafets e cantoneres e roses de lautó, apel·lat Revelaciones celestis sancte Brigide.<sup>12</sup>

[Item,. I. big book, in script from Avignon, on paper, with the beginning of each quire on parchment, in .II. columns, boards covered in plain black leather, metal clasps, called Revelaciones celestis sancte Brigide.]<sup>13</sup>

The first thing that is worth noticing is the level of detail in the description of the object, including name, writing support, columns, and binding. This is a common characteristic of many of the inventories studied by Josep Hernando i Delgado and J. Antoni Iglesias Fonseca. The transcription of this inventory was first made by J.M.

10 For an interpretation of affective piety through the lens of affect theory see Carrillo-Rangel 2019. For an introduction to affect theory see Seigworth & Gregg 2010. “Textual communities” is a term coined by Brian Stock in Stock 1983, pp. 88–240. “Emotional communities” is a term coined by Barbara H. Rosenwein, see Rosenwein 2007. For a fuller discussion of these concepts in relation to the reception of Birgitta in medieval Barcelona, see below.

11 I borrow and amend this title from the webinar series titled ‘Books Known Only by Title’, organized in 2020–2021 by the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

12 Iglesias Fonseca 1996, inv. 140.

13 My translation.

Madurell from an original document, now lost.<sup>14</sup> Iglesias Fonseca complements this translation with other sources, one of them dated 1431. It is worth noting that the date of the inventory signals in most cases the moment the books were being sold, donated, or bequeathed to someone else. This means that Felip de Malla purchased and perhaps used the book earlier than that. Iglesias Fonseca believes that this book was acquired during one of Felip de Malla's sojourns in France, mostly because the description of the script was characterized as from Avignon, and because of the presence in the inventory of books in French, for example, the *Roman de la Rose*, but also because Malla was sent on diplomatic missions to Avignon and Naples, among other destinations.<sup>15</sup> It is also worth mentioning that Malla studied in Paris between 1394 and 1403.<sup>16</sup> The truth is that the book could have been acquired elsewhere and there is no definitive proof of where it was obtained. The extent to which the book was read and used is another matter. For example, it is found often in the literature about Syon Abbey that the confessor general John Fewterer knew Hebrew because he donated a Hebrew concordance printed in Venice in 1524, but the copy, still in existence, has its paper pages uncut.<sup>17</sup> The pages of some printed books were and still are sometimes printed over a larger surface than the designated page of the book and the excess was folded during the binding process so the pages needed to be cut to access all of the book's contents. The same observation about the extent to which books were read and used is apposite when trying to establish the degree of knowledge and learning of a monastic institution through its inventory of books or catalogues, or any institution for that matter.

Malla was well known as a writer of sermons and one copy of his own writing was included in the inventory.<sup>18</sup> These texts should be reviewed to see if they include quotations, remarks by, or references to Birgitta of Sweden, which could be possible given

14 Madurell i Marimon 1964, pp. 557–562, 603–604.

15 Iglesias Fonseca 1996, inv. 140, nn. 19, 30. He was also in England for diplomatic reasons in 1415; Madurell i Marimon 1964, p. 514.

16 Madurell i Marimon 1964, pp. 500–502.

17 The catalogue of Syon Abbey has been edited by Vincent Gillespie in Gillespie & Doyle 2001. For Fewterer, see pp. 576–577. The shelf-mark of the concordance is Oxford, Merton College, 76.b.11.

18 Different volumes are simply called 'Sermons'. Madurell identifies in the public sale inventory one that possibly contains Malla's own sermons: "sermons pronunciats davan lo papa" ["sermons preached in front of the pope"]. Madurell also mentions sermons by Malla preserved at Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, MS 466; Montserrat, Arxiu de l'Abadia de Montserrat, MS 1112. For a detailed analysis of the contents of 466 and other works written by Malla, see Madurell i Marimon 1964, pp. 517–533.

the pattern of use of Birgittine texts in sermons in the rest of Europe.<sup>19</sup> The full inventory comprises around 66 books and includes works such as Aquinas's *Summa*, Seneca's tragedies, and different theological works by Augustine or others sometimes imprecisely identified.<sup>20</sup> In the transcription of the public sale that accompanies the inventory, the price and the buyer of the book is provided. Thus, the exemplar of Birgitta's *LC* ended up with Mestre Quiris, a member of the intellectual circle of "el convent de Sant Francesc i l'escrivania municipal", where highly learned and latinists individuals met and discussed different texts and produced translations to Catalan of some important Latin works like Cicero's *De Officiis*.<sup>21</sup>

The next pin in the map of medieval Barcelona and its surroundings is placed in Sant Andreu del Palomar, in medieval times a town near Barcelona. The inventory is dated 27 April 1430 and located in Sant Andreu del Palomar's church, and contains the books owned by Arnau Fonolleda and bequeathed to his daughter Isabel, wife of Joan Roure, to whom the inventory mainly refers.<sup>22</sup> Arnau Fonolleda is described as "ciutadà honrat de Barchinona", i.e., these are the books of a lay person. The inventory consists of seven books, two of them in Latin.<sup>23</sup> One of the books in Latin is a "Saint Birgitta":

<Primo>. I. libre scrit en paper, ab cubertes engrutades cubertes de cuyro vermell, ab correys e tencadors del dit cuyro. Lo qual sa apella de Santa Brígida. E comensa en letra vermella: "epistola compilantis librum ad monachas monasterii Sancte Brigide".

[<First>. I. book written on paper, with a cover made of red leather, with straps and lock in the same leather. It is titled of Saint Birgitta. It begins in red script: "epistola compilantis librum ad monachas monasterii Sancte Brigide".]<sup>24</sup>

It is normal for books in inventories to be referred to by author rather than title; perhaps it is not so common to provide the beginning or incipit, and this text does not

19 Andersson 2019; Adams 2008; O'Mara 1989; Powell 2017, among others.

20 Iglesias Fonseca 1996, inv. 140. Some of the descriptions do not provide an author but rather a vague description: "I. libre gran scrit en pergamiins, de letra francesa, appellat lo Hospitaler sobre la primera part de Job" ["One big book on parchment, in French script, titled lo Hospitaler, about the first part of Job"].

21 I am grateful to Lourdes Soriano Robles for this comment, see more about these intellectual circles in Sabaté i Marin 2019, pp. 39–43.

22 Arnau Fonolleda was a secretary of King Alfons el Magnànim and perhaps for this reason in close contact with Italian intellectuals, see Vilallonga 1993, pp. 98–101.

23 Iglesias Fonseca 1996, inv. 122.

24 "Engrutades" can mean that the paper page was pasted to the leather cover or that they contain "dirt". I am grateful to Josep Sucarrats for his assistance with this and other translations from Old Catalan.

match any possible beginning or incipit of Birgitta's *LC*. It is rather the beginning of a collection of revelations made by Alfonso of Jaén for the nuns of Vadstena. The *Celeste Viridarium* (here abbreviated to *CV*, *The Garden of Heavenly Delights*) has been described as "part of Alfonso's compilation dating from c. 1380", "a work dedicated to the nuns of Vadstena about the human lives of Christ and the Virgin Mary", or in the words of Birgitta's confessor Alfonso of Jaén, collecting "materias, que pertinent ad beatum aduentum ipsius Marie virginis, et Christi, filii eius, in mundum et de ipsorum sanctis virtutibus et gestis, que operabantur in mundo, donec ascenderunt ad sua celestia regna".<sup>25</sup> The text is in fact made of fragments from the main *LC* but arranged in the form of a dialogue between Birgitta and different characters, mainly Christ and the Virgin Mary. Arne Jönsson states that this text was produced for the nuns of Vadstena and not widely spread.<sup>26</sup> The presence of the compilation in the inventory of books of a lay person in medieval Barcelona, and the survival of two more manuscripts that were not known to him, might imply something very different.<sup>27</sup> It is also worth mentioning that when a book in an inventory or will is mentioned as "Saint Birgitta", it is not possible to know for certain if it is the *LC* in one of its two possible known redactions, or if it could be the *CV* or another compilation.

Among the rest of the books in the inventory, it is worth mentioning an autograph of the father of Arnau Fonolleda, which might suggest a connection with Rome and maybe Birgitta's spirituality, and might help to establish a possible date and location of the manuscript:

Item., I. llibre scrit en paper de mà del honrat en Miquel Roure, quondam, pare del dit deffunt, ab cubertes de pergami, en lo qual eren scrites les *Indulgències de Rome* e alters coses.

[Item., I. book written on paper by the hand of the honourable Miquel Roure, who was father of the deceased, with parchment covers in which the texts *Indulgences of Rome* and other things can be found.]

The interest in Rome and its indulgences suggest a pilgrimage to Rome, which would be common for the period. If the inventory is dated c. 1430, and the *Celeste Viridarium* was compiled and written c. 1380, it is possible to date both the indulgences

<sup>25</sup> Morris 1999, p. 105, n. 42; Sahlin 2001, p. 30; Alfonso's words are quoted from the edition of the prologue of the *Celeste Viridarium* in Jönsson 1989, p. 65. Jönsson presents here the most complete discussion of the *Celeste Viridarium*, but he edits only the prologue. Translated the quote reads: "topics that belong to the blessed coming of the Virgin Mary herself, and Christ, her son, into the world, as well as their holy virtues and deeds, which they performed in the world, until they ascended to the heavenly kingdoms".

<sup>26</sup> Jönsson 1989, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> See below.



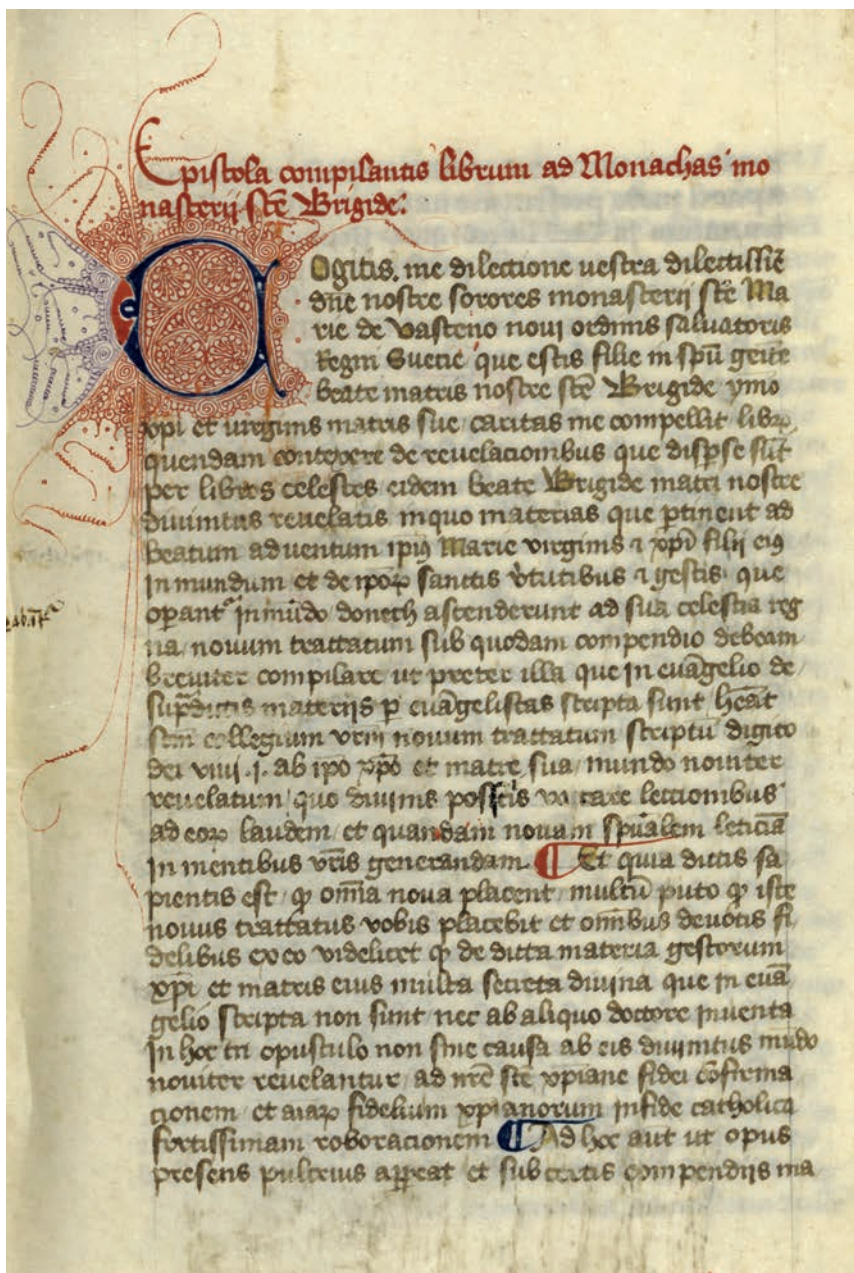


Fig. 1. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/4444, f. 9r. By permission: BNE.



manuscript and the possible purchase of the *Celeste Viridarium* to the end of the 14th century.

The name “honourable citizen”, which is applied in the document to both Joan and Miquel Roure, refers to a specific social class in the contexts of the Crown of Aragon.<sup>28</sup> They were citizens who owned some rural land, and also possessed monetary capital that they could invest in different aspects of Mediterranean trade, and they furthermore dominated the city administration. Joan and Miquel Roure could be connected to a notary, Julià Roure, who wrote many of the inventories and public sales of the members of the Barcelona Cathedral, such as Felip Malla.<sup>29</sup> Roure is a common surname, and thus makes any further attempts to identify either the individual or the family difficult.

### BOOKS, OWNERS, AND USES

There is a manuscript, currently at the National Library of Spain (BNE), that shares the incipit with the *Celeste Viridarium* (Fig. 1) and can be traced to medieval Barcelona. This perhaps is the book referred to in the inventory of books owned by Joan Roure. The manuscript is wrongly catalogued as *Revelaciones*, but is mentioned in the different catalogues of the BNE now with the shelf-mark MS/4444.<sup>30</sup> In addition to its scripts and some codicological features, we can locate it in Barcelona because of an ownership note in the flyleaf (Fig. 2): “Lo present libre es del Monasteri de sant Jeronimi de la Vall de Ebron situat sobre Barchinona” [“This book belongs to the Monastery of Saint Hieronymus from the valley of Ebron located over Barcelona”].<sup>31</sup>

Barcelona is surrounded by mountains. In one of these areas there was a concentration of hermits as early as 1386, the year when Ponç Astor, one of the hermits, was allowed by the bishop to celebrate mass.<sup>32</sup> As in other areas with a similar concentration or non-regulated religious men and women, a monastery was planned in the area, in this case by the queen, Violant de Bar (1365–1431). The construction and establishment of the monastery was complex, and its history is intertwined with another monastery of the Hieronymite Order, Sant Jeroni de la Murtra, currently in the town of Badalona. The monastery Sant Jeroni de la Vall d’Hebron was sacked by the French during Napoleon’s invasion in 1808 and very few documents or books or traces of the building have survived (Figs. 3, 4). The Hieronymite Order is connected to Birgitta

28 Iglesias Fonseca 1996, ‘Llibres i lectors ...’, p. 109.

29 Iglesias Fonseca 1996, p. 187.

30 *Inventario General de Manuscritos*, n.d.

31 My translation.

32 Baldiri 2006.

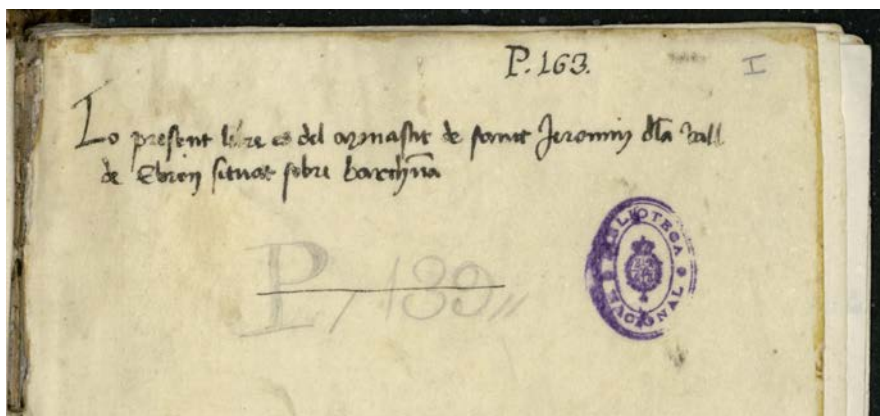


Fig. 2. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/4444, f. I. By permission: BNE.

of Sweden through the brother of Alfonso of Jaén, Pedro Fernández, and Alfonso himself, who might have met Birgitta for the first time in Rome during a journey to obtain approval for the Order.<sup>33</sup> The development of the Hieronymite Order dates to 1373 when it was approved to follow the rule of Saint Augustine, and, given its generic character, invited to follow the constitutions of the monastery of the Holy Sepulchre in Campora, Florence.<sup>34</sup> Taking as an example Sant Jeroni de la Murtra, and assuming the purpose and everyday life of that monastery was similar to Sant Jeroni de la Vall d'Hebron, the monastic community at Sant Jeroni de la Murtra had an intense intellectual task in the form of transcribing and translating different theological works. One such example made there is the translation of Angela of Foligno to Catalan, currently held at Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, MS 473.<sup>35</sup> The monastery, as others in the Order, was well connected to the elites and possibly engaged in some sort of pastoral care of lay members who were not lay brothers, as well as charitable works, for example, the donation of food leftovers to the poor.<sup>36</sup>

33 Jönsson 1989, p. 69. There are some similarities between the Birgittine Order and the Hieronymite Order, for example, both include a one-year probation period for professed members, with differences in the application.

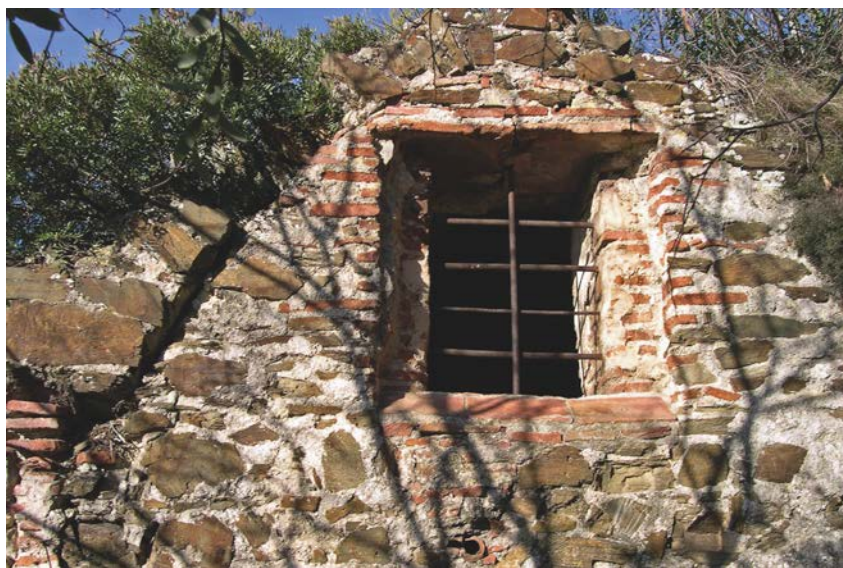
34 Diaz Martí 2017, p. 143 and doc. 1.

35 Martino Alba 2014. For the manuscript of Angela de Foligno, see Acosta Garcia 2020.

36 Or anyone who would approach the door at Sant Jeroni de la Murtra. This story is told in the guided visits to the still-standing monastery, and matches the Hieronymite spirituality; Rodríguez Luna 2006.



*Fig. 3. Pau Rigalt, Monastery of Sant Jeroni de la Vall d'Hebron, 1825–1830, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, colecció Casellas, 1911. © Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2022.*



*Fig. 4. Remains of the Monastery of Sant Jeroni de la Vall d'Hebron (<https://monestirs.cat/>).*

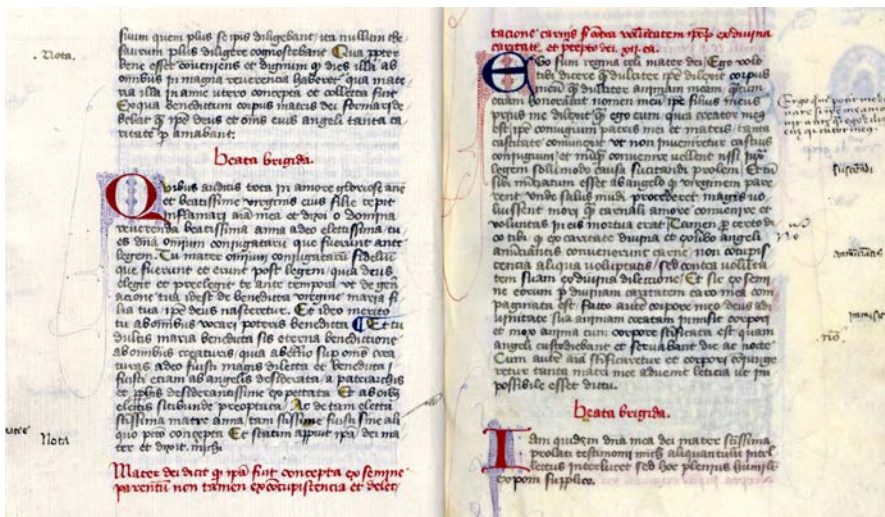


Fig. 5. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/4444, f. 31v, 32r. By permission: BNE.

The manuscript is written on paper and parchment, in rotunda script, and dates to the end of the 14th century or more likely to the first half of the 15th century, according to palaeographical criteria and the study of the watermarks.<sup>37</sup> It begins with a tabula, contemporary with the manuscript, and before the prologue the incipit 'Epistola compilantis librum ad Monachas monasterii Sancte Brigide' appears. It presently has 129 pages, with some 19th-century paper additions as flyleaves to the beginning and to the end, presumably the date of its present binding and its arrival to the National Library of Spain, matching the chronology of the monastery and the date of its final closure in 1835.<sup>38</sup> It is written by one hand and was widely used afterwards, given the quantity and variance of marginalia in different scripts and languages, from Latin to Catalan (Fig. 5, fol. 32). The characteristic decoration of the initials and the script reveal that the book was probably produced in the Crown of Aragon, perhaps in Barcelona. Could this have been the same book that was in the hands of Joan Roure?

The Monastery Sant Jeroni de la Vall d'Hebron began acquiring their library holdings through the second-hand book market, as is known from an inscription on the flyleaf of another surviving manuscript from its library at the BNE, MS/1792, dated

<sup>37</sup> The watermark is the same throughout all of the volume, three mountains inside a circle with line and cross, very similar to Briquet 11862.

<sup>38</sup> Two of the initial five flyleaves are contemporary with the rest of the manuscript: V+129+III.



1417, which matches the beginnings of the Monastery of Vall d'Hebron and presumably with the formation of a proper library or archive.<sup>39</sup> So it is possible that the volume mentioned in the inventory and this one are the same, and it was purchased after the date of the inventory, although there is also the possibility of two different volumes of the same text. There is a book which belonged to Julià Roure at the Biblioteca Capítular de Barcelona, Cod. 6 (I), dated between 1430–1439, that shared the same watermark that is present in MS 4444, which perhaps was a copy of the original volume owned by Arnau Fonolleda and later Joan Roure.

In any case, the interest of the Hieronymites in Birgitta is manifest if printed volumes previously in Hieronymite libraries are taken into account. For example, there is a 1556 edition of Birgitta's *LC* currently at the Manuscripts and Rare Books section of the library of the University of Barcelona which bears an ownership inscription and a seal of the Monastery of Vall d'Hebron.<sup>40</sup>

There are four surviving manuscripts containing the *Celeste Viridarium*:

- Cividale del Friuli, Archivio Capitolare Duomo di Cividale, MS 675. It is dated 1392. It contains only the *Celeste Viridarium* and it was written by a lay person, Johannis Danielis, from Antwerp, who identifies himself and dates the text in the colophon, fol. 135.<sup>41</sup>
- Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 4444. Contains the text of the *Celeste Viridarium* only.
- Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon Misc. 475, dating to the 15th century and of unknown origin. Contains the text of the *Celeste Viridarium* only.
- London, British Library, MS Harley 612, fols. 133r–160r. Written by Thomas Colyngbourn for Syon Abbey in the mid-15th century. References to this volume are multiple in the literature about Syon Abbey, as it reproduces the *LC* divided into twelve books, including other texts such as the canonization proceedings and the *Celeste Viridarium*, which indicates that at least around that date the text was important enough to be copied in this manner.

39 The inscription reads: "Jhs. Christus. Lo present libre, qui son dos volums, fou comprat per los priors e frares del Monestir de sant Jeronim de la vayll dabron de madona Agnes, muller quondam del honrat en Ramon çavall ciutada de barchinona, per mans den Guillem comes corredor de libres, dimecres trenta Juny Any dela Nativitat de nostre senyor M.cccc. deset. per preu de Sexanta florins sens les correduries que son dos florins", BNE, MS/1792, fol. I.

40 The shelf-mark for this volume is Barcelona, Fons Antic, Universitat de Barcelona, 07 XVI–2512.

41 I thank Professor Ignasi Baiges at the University of Barcelona for his help with the transcription of the colophon and thank Margareta Agrell, who is working on a critical edition of the *Celeste Viridarium*, for her comments about the text via email.

The text might have been more important than previously thought, perhaps in the context of making Birgitta well read and well known before, during, and after the canonization proceedings. Birgittine monks, much like monks from the Hieronymite Order, translated a myriad of devotional tracts into the vernacular. In the context of the *Celeste Viridarium*, it is worth mentioning the work of Jöns Budde, who allegedly translated it, and whose translation is now lost with only his preface surviving.<sup>42</sup> Two of the four surviving manuscripts were copied or used by lay people, the Madrid and Cividale manuscripts, while the Oxford manuscript is uncertain, and the London manuscript was copied in the large book of Syon Abbey. The text begins with a prologue addressing the nuns of Vadstena which, in Arne Jönsson's edition titled 'Epistola Servi Christi ad Moniales Monasterii Sancte Marie de Wadzsteno Regni Suecie vbi seplta est Beata Brigida', matches the incipit of the prologue in both the Oxford and London manuscripts, while in both the Madrid and Cividale manuscripts the incipit is shorter and mentions the book: 'Epistola compilantis librum ad Monachas monasterii Sancte Brigide'.<sup>43</sup> In all the accounts, nuns and Saint Birgitta's monasteries are always mentioned. A detailed textual history and analysis of the *Celeste Viridarium* is still to be published.<sup>44</sup> C. Annette Grisé has pointed out a possible explanation in relation to *The Orchard of Syon*—a translation of Catherine of Siena's Revelations that has a prologue similar to the *Celeste Viridarium*, addressing the nuns. Grisé suggests the possibility that the prologue was a strategy adopted to reach a greater audience. The readers of the book would see themselves in the mirror of the nuns of the monastery by identifying with them. The same framing strategy in the *Celeste Viridarium* suggests that the intended audience of this text was lay people.<sup>45</sup>

There is another surviving manuscript, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Ripoll, MS 75 (Fig. 6), that could have circulated or exerted influence in the circles of medieval Barcelona spirituality. Currently held at Barcelona, it is a manuscript of the *LC* which has been mutilated, with important text lacunae, lacking several full books, and with

42 Information about this and his life can be found in Pitkäranta 2008. Budde's preface to the *Celeste Viridarium* is printed in Porthan 1867, pp. 145–147. I am grateful to Elin Andersson for this reference.

43 Jönsson 1989, pp. 177–179. For the other two incipits: Cividale del Friuli, Archivio Capitolare Duomo di Cividale, MS 675, fol. 8r; and Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MS 4444, fol. 9r.

44 Jönsson 1989, pp. 173–175. In the context of the textual transmission of the *LC*, or the *Revelaciones*, only Sten Eklund incorporates the *CV* in the discussion of his edition of the *Sermo Angelicus*; Eklund 1972, pp. 7–57.

45 Grisé 2002. For framing as a narrative strategy and its cultural implications see Bal 2002, pp. 130–173.



Fig. 6. Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Ripoll, MS 75, 75r. By permission: GENCAT.

the decoration missing, possibly because of the quality of gold used in the execution.<sup>46</sup> This is presumably a second volume of a presentation of the text in two, beginning abruptly in the middle of one of the books, or parts, in which the *LC* is divided. The book belonged to the Monastery of Ripoll, from which it was taken to the Archive in

46 There is a manuscript description attached to the parchment cover: Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Ripoll, MS 75, cover.

1822 because of the confiscation of ecclesiastical property during the Trienio Liberal (1820–1823).<sup>47</sup> Whatever remains of books from Ripoll at the Archive is a result of the failure to return the books once ecclesiastical property was restored. The archivist Próspero de Bofarull delayed the books' return to the monastery saying that he needed to finish cataloguing and re-binding them.<sup>48</sup> This intervention was crucial in saving those books from the fires, attacks, and further incidents that later occurred at Ripoll. By the time Valls Taberner published a catalogue of the volumes from Ripoll available at the Archive, some pages were missing: "Revelationum Sanctae virginis Brigidae libri V Faltan las primeras hojas. Pergamino folio menos. Siglo 15. Numero actual 75, Numero moderno 24, Numero antiguo 54."<sup>49</sup> In previous catalogues, dated 1752 and 1649, the *LC* is mentioned as "163. Liber Rebelationum Christi ad B. Brigidam" and "In folio, liber anarchos et acephalos, hoc est sine principio, sine autore."<sup>50</sup> There are no specifications about the work being divided into volumes, but it is worth noticing the pages were already missing in 1649.<sup>51</sup> There are no surviving inventories before 1649, and so the date at which the manuscript arrived at Ripoll is difficult to ascertain, as well as its previous life. The book was preserved even if mutilated, and this might be evidence of the archival practices at Ripoll or perhaps the importance given to this volume by the monks. The mutilated manuscript dates to the second half of the 14th century according to the piece of paper pasted into the cover of the manuscript with information compiled by the archivists, and to the 14th century according to Rudolf Beer in his catalogue published in 1915.<sup>52</sup>

Birgitta of Sweden died in 1373 and her *LC* began to circulate shortly after in what is known as the first redaction, consisting of a prologue and seven books or parts, prepared by her confessor Alfonso de Jaén between 1377 and 1378.<sup>53</sup> The manuscript in Ripoll supports this idea when at the end one reads: "Explicit ultimus liber", after the conclusion of book VII. Later an eighth book and other materials such as *vitae* or the *Sermo Angelicus* would be added to the textual transmission. According to F. Thomas Luongo "the production of the first wave of manuscripts of Birgittine texts was led by a single Neapolitan workshop" and were "lavishly illustrated codices" intended for their examination by members of the papal commission in the canonization proceedings.<sup>54</sup>

47 Valls Taberner 1931.

48 Valls Taberner 1931, p. 5.

49 Valls Taberner 1931, p. 27.

50 Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 9/3984 no. 13, fol. 15r; Martínez Diez 1969, p. 371.

51 For example, Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, 9/3984 no. 13, fol. 71r–v.

52 Barcelona, ACA Ripoll MS 75, cover.

53 Undhagen 1978, pp. 1–37.

54 Luongo 2018, p. 1110.



However, there is a letter by Alfonso himself to the Archbishop of Uppsala which says that “the revelations were already known in Spain and being copied in Italy and Sicily”.<sup>55</sup> It is worth noticing again that between 1331 and 1388, both Naples and Sicily were part of the Crown of Aragon, hence an early copy of the *LC* sent to Ripoll or to Barcelona is plausible for purposes other than its examination by the papal commission. The monastery of Ripoll was an important centre of knowledge and power, and it is also possible that it was home to one of the members of the papal commission.

The previous life of the Ripoll manuscript is difficult to ascertain or even to speculate about. It could have been circulated in medieval Barcelona before arriving to Ripoll: we know that volumes of the *LC* were already in circulation thanks to the inventory of Felip Malla. It could also be one of the first volumes copied and distributed, or even a volume that belonged to one of the members of the papal commission, the golden and decorative elements of which were torn apart to be used in other manuscripts or documents once its purpose was served and before being archived at Ripoll. These manuscripts existed or were mentioned in documents that touched and related to other stories of affective relations with Birgitta.

#### AFECTIVE COMMUNITIES

I have commented before that the presence of a book, or even its mention in a document, is not a guarantee that the book was used or read, but the amount of marginalia by different hands in different times in the copy of the *Viridarium* held at Madrid, BNE, MS/4444, and the ownership of Birgittine texts by lay people attests to a probable reception. Also, this reception is not dependent on the presence of books or texts, I argue, and I also contend that more attention should be placed to mentions, quotes, and references in types of documents other than the literary source itself. In the context of medieval Barcelona, and within the same chronological frame, two important events, or *momentums*, occurred that help to explain the emergence of affective communities with regard to Birgitta, and that eventually led to the figure of Marina de Escobar.<sup>56</sup>

These two events were the attempted and failed foundation of a Birgittine monastery in Valencia, and the presence in Barcelona of one of Birgitta's companions in

<sup>55</sup> Morris 1999, p. 152.

<sup>56</sup> Marina de Escobar (1554–1633) was a Spanish mystic and visionary who founded a reformed branch of the Birgittine Order, the first monastery of which was located in Valladolid, with later expansions to the rest of Castille and America. For more about the way her figure is intertwined with Birgitta, see Carrillo-Rangel 2017a, with further references.



*Fig. 7. Church of Sant Llützer, Barcelona. Photograph: Enzo (CC SA 3).*

Rome and the communities that were mediated through her.<sup>57</sup> Since the focus of this paper is Barcelona, I will not comment on the attempted foundation at Valencia, but once again it is worth noticing that both cities belonged at that time to the same kingdom and sphere of influence, and ties between the patron of Valencia, Lorenzo Salom, should be further explored.<sup>58</sup> As for Birgitta's companion in Rome, who was later in Barcelona after Birgitta's death, her name was Sor Sança and she was an important figure linked to the Beguines of Barcelona, who dwelt near the church of Saint Llàtzer at the end of the 14th century (*Fig. 7*).

Sor Sança's name appears in various documents. One of them is a letter from Queen Maria de Luna, which defines her as companion of Saint Birgitta in Rome, and requests that when she dies, the devotional objects that belonged to Saint Birgitta should be retrieved. In the previous scholarship about Sor Sança and the Beguines in Barcelona, the name Sor Sança is mentioned at different times and is assumed to be the same person.<sup>59</sup> The first document, dated 1390, is part of a series of donations from the queen to several Beguines, Sor Sança among them.<sup>60</sup> The second document, dated 1393, mentions her as a Franciscan tertiary, and grants her permission to bury the corpses of those who fell from the gallows within the limits of the city.<sup>61</sup> At that time, it was expected that the bodies of the executed be left to rot on the ground or while still hanging at the gallows. The document is signed this time by King Joan I and emphasizes further the links between the Beguines and the elites. The last document that mentions Sor Sança, dated 1448, is a petition from the Beguines who gathered in the "resclusatge" or anchorhold of Santa Margarida near the Hospital of Sant Llàtzer; the anchorhold's name is derived from the altar dedicated to Santa Margarida in the hospital's church.<sup>62</sup> In this "suplicació" to the Consell de Cent, one of the government bodies, a woman called Brigida Terrera mentions Sor Sança in the context of explaining the origins of the community in the second half of the 14th century, specifically re-

57 For the attempted foundation in Valencia, see Cnattingius 1963, pp. 42–46. For Birgitta's companion presence in Barcelona, see Carrillo-Rangel 2017b.

58 Specifically, in connection with hospitals and assistance, since he was behind the establishment of the Hospital de Ignoscents, Folls e Orats in Valencia, and given the ties with hospitable institutions of both Hieronymite monasteries in Barcelona and the dedication to "Santa Brigida" of other similar hospitals in some territories of Castille.

59 Botinas i Montero *et al.* 2002.

60 The documents are edited in Botinas i Montero *et al.* 2002, p. 152. The original document can be found in Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Reial Patrimoni, Mestre Racional, 515, fols. 32r and 77v.

61 For the edition, see Botinas i Montero *et al.* 2002, pp. 152–153, and for the original document, Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Reg. 1964, fol. 60r.

62 For a story of Santa Margarida, see Botinas i Montero *et al.* 2002, pp. 83–92.

garding the continuity after the death of the founder: “se reclusi una molt devota dona appellada sor Sança companyona de santa Brigida” [“A very devout woman named Sor Sança, who was a companion to Saint Birgitta in Rome, entered the anchorhold”].<sup>63</sup>

Even if Santa Margarida is called a “resclusatge” in the document, probably the term should be understood in a broader meaning than the term anchorhold in the context of English spirituality. Perhaps a more accurate description would be that of a community of Beguines formed around a first anchoress, who “enclosed” herself in a house donated by her father. The community of Beguines was investigated for unorthodoxy by the authorities, and in their defence the women appealed that Sor Sança was one of their number and that she had been a companion of Birgitta in Rome. In the context of the Peninsular Kingdoms, and as I have mentioned before concerning the hermits in Vall d’Hebron, this process of enforcing some kind of regulation regarding these forms of spirituality was frequent at the time. It is worth mentioning in this case that the community of Beguines would form a female monastery belonging to the Hieronymite Order. In any case, Birgitta is mentioned as an assurance of orthodoxy, especially during the investigative process against the community of Beguines. That Birgitta was mentioned at that precise moment tells us a lot about how influential her figure was in medieval Barcelona, and acknowledging this against the historical background forces us to reconsider the role and fame of Birgitta. There are, however, no specific dates in the document linking this Sor Sança to the Beguine mentioned before, but there is another reference, dated 1401, to a companion of Birgitta in Rome. It is a letter from Queen Maria de Luna to the royal court’s Mestre Racional:

(...) una beguina que estava em Barchinona proper la Esglesia de Sancta Margarida, tenia vers si mentre vivia diverses coses que havien servit a la persona de Sancta Brigida e en special lo silici, les disciplines e le correge e morta aquella que no ha molt que mori, vos o sor Teresa beguina que servia la dita resclusa, prengues en continent les dites coses e aquelles vos tenits encare.<sup>64</sup>

[(...) a Beguine who was in Barcelona close to the Church of Santa Margarida, had with her while she lived different things that had been used by Saint Birgitta and especially the cilice [spiked garter], the disciplines, and the strap, and her being dead, which was not so long ago, you or Sor Teresa, Beguine, who helped the said recluse, took in custody the said things and you still have them.]<sup>65</sup>

63 My translation. For the edition of the document, see Botinas i Montero *et al.* 2002, pp. 157–158. The original document is Barcelona, Arxiu Històric Municipal de Barcelona, Deliberacions del Consell de Cent, fols. 171r–172r.

64 Botinas i Montero *et al.* 2002, p. 84, from the document in Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d’Aragó, Reg. 2350, fol. 6v. The document has not been fully transcribed or edited and perhaps more archival work in connection with Sor Sança should be undertaken in future research.

65 My translation.

Given the interchangeability of the terms “Beguina” and “resclusa”, it is safe to assume that at least the Sor Sança in the sphere of Sant Llätzer/Santa Margarida and the companion of Birgitta in Rome, who kept her relics, were likely the same person.<sup>66</sup> The fact that a community formed around the figure of Sor Sança emphasizes the idea of affective communities, for these communities the mere connection with such a reputed individual as Birgitta was important when addressing the authorities and probably her figure served as a distinctive legitimizing characteristic of the community as well as part of their identity.

Community is a word used broadly among medievalists researching any aspect of devotional culture, and as with any other concepts, the notion of community has multiple implications. In the case of Sor Sança, the queen and Brigida Terrera’s following, their affect for Birgitta seems not to be based on a text, but almost in physical contact, in personal knowledge, and in memory. In a similar way, the use and possession of certain books could have the same effect. The link with Birgitta, in the case of medieval Barcelona, is not merely structured around an authoritative text as both Brian Stock and Barbara H. Rosenwein suggest for the concepts of textual communities and emotional communities.<sup>67</sup> Both their concepts are very interesting in their particular time frames. But late medieval spirituality seems to merge the ideas of person and text in an affective or touching way. The circulation in medieval Barcelona of objects that belonged to Birgitta, different versions of Birgittine texts, and personal memories create different intensities of relation to Birgitta that develop around an affect, a particular devotion, perhaps a role model, for her exemplarity but also for her particularities.

## CONCLUSION

There are further traces of Birgitta to be explored in the Crown of Aragon, Castille, and Portugal that suggest the need to re-evaluate the influence of Birgitta in the Peninsular Kingdoms and hence in present-day Spain. The presence of books and their uses is difficult to evaluate, but in this particular case, *Celeste Viridarium* shows many

66 There is another Birgitta relic, perhaps part of the ones mentioned here, that can be found in the sources. In a devotional broadsheet, a genre quite popular in Catalonia during the end of 19th century, titled ‘Goigs’ (‘Joys’), it can be read: “Goits en alabansa de Santa Brigida viuda, la reliquia de la cual se venera en la parroquial iglesia de Estañol” [“Joys in praise of Saint Birgitta, widow, whose relic is worshipped in the parish church of Estañol”]. The broadsheet is dated 1870 according to the catalogue of the Biblioteca Nacional de Catalunya, where the document is preserved with signature I Go M 173. Estanyol is a town located in present-day Girona.

67 Stock 1983 and Rosenwein 2007, see note 10 above.

marks of use as noted in its marginalia. The connection to hospitable institutions and the charity of the Hieronymite Order opens the possibility that the text was used for pastoral care of lay people or simply read many times within the community. A more interesting development in the context of a possible affective reception of the figure of Birgitta is evidenced by the community formed first around Sor Sança and then around Brigida Terrera.<sup>68</sup> If the link to Birgitta was used in connection with the defence of the community, it proves that Birgitta's prestige and fame was somewhat disconnected from the texts attributed to her and the multiple process of ratification to which these texts were submitted. The frequent link between the Hieronymite Order and objects, moments, and texts linked to Birgitta, suggest that the Hieronymite Order's development took the space that could have been occupied by the Birgittine Order, at least until Marina de Escobar's recollection. At any rate, the importance of affect, as well as the use of Latin as a lingua franca that was more read than previously thought, plays a fundamental role in the formation of these Birgittine affective communities.

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68 It is difficult to ascertain if Brigida Terrera was named after Birgitta, since even today traces such as confraternities and church dedications to the Irish Brigid of Kildare (451–525) are frequent in territories that belonged to the Crown of Aragon and Castille.



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# Birgittine Circles in the Baltic Sea Region

## *Intercessory Prayers and Gifts of Friendship*

In the 15th century, the Birgittine Order, with its centre in Vadstena, spread rapidly across the Baltic Sea region and further south across Europe. Less than a hundred years after the foundation of Vadstena and Pope Urban V's confirmation of St Birgitta's *Regula Sanctissimi Salvatoris* in 1370, ten new Birgittine monasteries were established across the region. The Baltic Sea was accordingly the earliest region of Birgittine expansion before the Order established monasteries in the Low Countries and southern Germany.<sup>1</sup> The modern spirituality of the Birgittine Order, founded on St Birgitta's visions that focused on the Virgin Mary and on Christ's suffering, was aimed at all levels of society, which also was a contributing factor to the vast advance of the Birgittines. The monasteries of the order combined both the traditional contemplative monastic lifestyle via the reclusion of the Birgittine sisters, and the community-engaging lifestyle of the mendicant orders via the public preaching of the Birgittine brothers.<sup>2</sup> The broad appeal of Birgittine spirituality and the networks of people promoting St Birgitta's cult were important contributing factors to the quick establishment of the order.<sup>3</sup> The foundations of the Birgittine monasteries were usually joint projects that engaged local and regional actors. A new monastery was also dependent on having

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- 1 Marienbrunn (Gdansk 1398), Mariendal (Tallinn c. 1407), Maria Triumph (Lublin 1412), Marienwohlde (Mölln 1413), Mariibo (Lolland 1416), Marienkrone (Stralsund 1425), Munkaliv (1425), Nädendal (Turku 1438), Mariager (Jylland 1446), Marienfriede (Elblag 1458). There were also early Birgittine monasteries in England and Italy, but these monasteries did not initiate a wave of Birgittine expansion in the same manner as around the Baltic Sea.
  - 2 Härdelin 1998, pp. 79–94; Hutchison 2019, pp. 269–288; Andersen 2014, pp. 205–230.
  - 3 Salmesvuori 2014, pp. 23–40; Olesen 1991, pp. 169–219; Bainbridge 2017, pp. 128–143; Hess 2008, pp. 99–204.

support from local society in order to attract donations and secure its sustenance and a basis for the recruitment of new members. Therefore, the community of benefactors around a monastery was vital to its prosperity. The aim of this chapter is to explore the people of the Birgittine benefactor communities in the Baltic Sea region and their interaction with the monasteries.<sup>4</sup>

### THREE BIRGITTINE MONASTERIES IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

The focus lies here on the benefactor communities around three Birgittine monasteries: Mariendal near Tallinn, Marienkrone at Stralsund, and Nådendal in the diocese of Turku. The regional perspective enables an overview of the composition of the Birgittine circles around the monasteries and underscores their significance to people in the local communities. The monasteries were located within three political spheres of the Baltic rim. Mariendal was founded in 1407, in the countryside outside Tallinn in northern Estonia, a region governed by the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order that was also involved in the monastery's foundation. This monastery gained benefactors both among the burghers in Tallinn as well as among the northern Estonian nobility.<sup>5</sup> Marienkrone was founded in 1421 in the city of Stralsund, in the duchy of Pomerania, by the city council; the monastery was located just outside the gates of the city. Its vicinity to Stralsund offered this monastery both a distinguished urban character and benefactors from the urban elite of Stralsund.<sup>6</sup> The Nådendal monastery was located in south-western Finland, within the Swedish realm, which was part of the Nordic union (the so-called Kalmar Union) of the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The monastery was founded in 1438 by people connected to the ruling elite of the union, but the majority of the monastery's benefactors belonged to the local nobility.<sup>7</sup>

The Birgittine Order was accordingly a new monastic order in the 15th century and was still seeking its administrative form, which meant that the practical organization of the monasteries and their models of economic sustenance were also adaptable to the preferences of the founding generation.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, new monasteries of the order were founded in rural areas as well as in the immediate vicinity of major urban centres.

4 Nyberg 1965.

5 Markus 2012, pp. 13–18; 2013, pp. 93–108; Rajamaa 2018; *Diarium Vadstenense* (henceforth *DV*) 149, 151; *Liv-, Esth- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten* (henceforth *LECUB*) I:IV 2325, 2326, 2329; *LECUB* I:V 2457, 2507, 2534.

6 Hoogeweg 1925, pp. 732–757.

7 Klockars 1979, pp. 12–18; Suvanto 1976, pp. 118–128.

8 Gejrot 1990, pp. 195–214.



*Fig. 1. The ruins of the Birgittine church in Mariendal. Photograph: Anna-Stina Hägglund.*

Depending on the location, the monasteries came to develop a more urban or a rural character. Even though they all adhered to the rule of the Holy Saviour and the other Birgittine legislative texts, the practical organization of each monastery depended on the local legislation, authorities, as well as local customs and practices.<sup>9</sup>

Ecclesiastically, all three monasteries were connected to the Scandinavian church provinces: Nådendal in the diocese of Turku was part of the church province of Uppsala; Mariendal in the diocese of Tallinn belonged to the province of Lund, this after the Teutonic Order's acquisition of Estonia in 1346 (*Fig. 1*); whereas Marienkrone was located in the diocese of Schwerin in the province of Hamburg, but the main part of the monastery's landed property was on the island of Rügen, which was connected to the diocese of Roskilde and the province of Lund. Thus, a study of the regional perspective highlights the local circumstances, but the regional connectedness via trading routes and the church were also important for the establishment and the regional dispersion of Birgittine ideas, which also brought the monasteries benefactors from other locations across the region. In this chapter, we will encounter people who chose to endow the Birgittines at the three above-mentioned locations and who wished for various spiritual favours of the sisters and brothers living in the monasteries. The donations of these benefactors give glimpses into the interactions between the Birgittines and their benefactor communities.

#### THE BIRGITTINE SPECIAL BENEFACTORS AND FRIENDS

The Birgittine Order was attractive to those who planned to found new monasteries because its monastic model served both the spiritual needs of the Birgittine sisters and of the lay visitors to their church via the preaching of the Birgittine priest brothers.<sup>10</sup> A Birgittine monastery could accordingly serve the spiritual needs of the laity in a context where the devotional practices were increasingly focused on individual piety, which also was a reason given by the Swedish Council of the Realm for the foundation of Nådendal.<sup>11</sup> Around the three monasteries, distinguished benefactor communities emerged from the circle of founders, and persons connected to this group of people. These communities consisted of people who endowed the Birgittines with landed property, money, valuable items, food, or clothing. Some donated in return for the entrance of a daughter, or sometimes for their own entry into the Birgittine community. The donations and testamentary bequests not only indicate the ties between the

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Nyberg 1965.

<sup>10</sup> Hårdelin 1998, pp. 79–94.

<sup>11</sup> *Diplomatarium Fennicum* (henceforth *DF*) 2265.



Birgittines and their benefactors, but also the Birgittines' position within the regional and local sacred topography when people chose to endow the Birgittines instead of, or together with, other religious institutions.

The Birgittine benefactors expected personal commemoration for themselves and their deceased family members in return for their donations and bequests. In order to remember those who supported their communities, all Birgittine monasteries kept records of people whom they were expected to especially mention in their prayers. For example, the *Martiloge* of the English Birgittine monastery Syon Abbey contains such a list of deceased benefactors for whom they would pray. This list gives a thorough insight into the identity of benefactors and allows for a detailed study of them. As Virginia Bainbridge demonstrates, the English Birgittines managed to attract benefactors from different political factions and also from people who wished to gain political and social influence through their donation. The donations could function as a display of loyalty and ambition among people who chose to donate to the same institutions as their superiors. The list of benefactors at Syon shows that the gifts to the monastery also were of socio-political significance.<sup>12</sup> No complete list of benefactors has survived from the three monasteries that are in focus here, which would have allowed for a similar study of the political meaning of endorsing the Birgittines in the Baltic Sea region. Still, the remaining sources give some information on the social origin of the benefactors and the role of the Birgittines in the local communities.

A fragmented list of benefactors, in the form of one calendar folio, exists from Mariendal and gives some insight into the bonds of friendship that the monastery created with people in northern Estonia (*Fig. 2*). The calendar fragment contains a few notes on deceased benefactors and was rediscovered in the 1930s in the Swedish National Archives by the archivist Paul Johansen.<sup>13</sup> It covers the months May and June and was probably created in Mariendal sometime in the second half of the 15th century.<sup>14</sup> The fragment includes names of five deceased persons who were Birgittines and lay benefactors. These persons have probably been inscribed in the calendar to keep track of the annual services of remembrance that the Birgittines in Mariendal were expected to perform on the dates of their death. A woman named Gertrud Lode is noted having died on 1 June 1492. She belonged to one of the fief-holding families that had a strong connection to Mariendal and whose members had been included in its lay fraternity from the early days of the monastery. The first time the Lodes are mentioned in the Mariendal sources is in 1418 when the nobleman Otto Lode and his wife Köne were

<sup>12</sup> Gejrot 2015; Bainbridge 2017, pp. 128–143.

<sup>13</sup> RA, Fr 25617; Johansen 1939.

<sup>14</sup> Johansen 1939; Strenga 2020, p. 215.

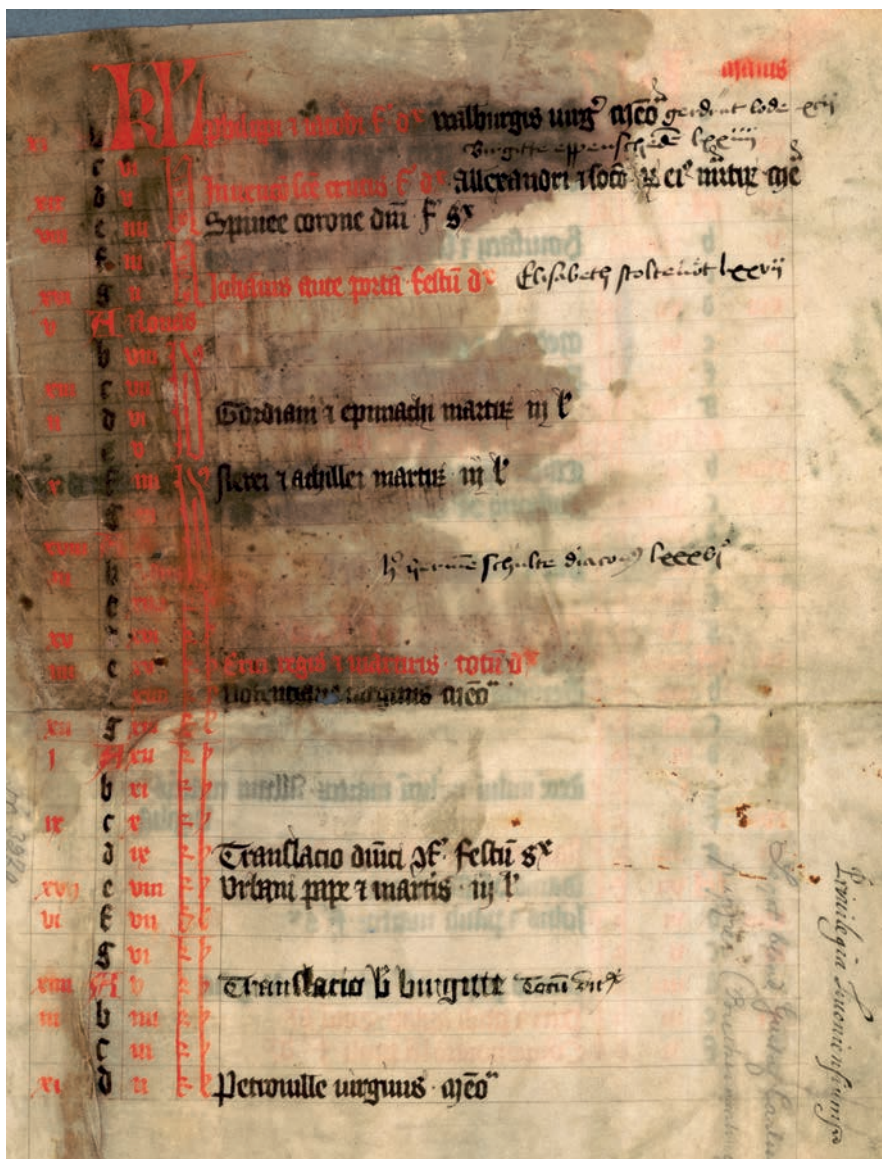


Fig. 2. Calendar fragment from Mariendal with inscriptions of deceased Birgittines and benefactors. Swedish National Archives, Livonica II, Fr. 25617. By permission: Swedish National Archives.



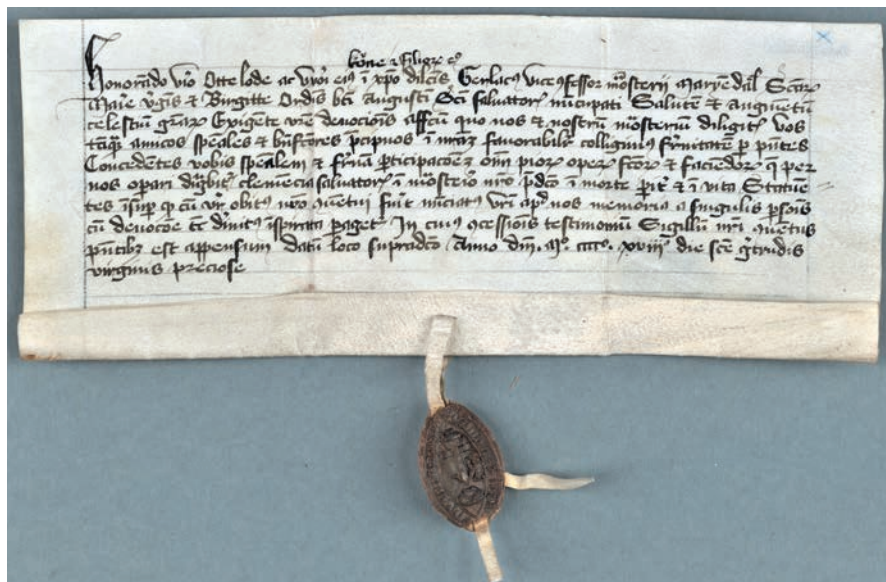


Fig. 3. Letter issued by Confessor General Gerlach Kruse at Mariendal where he granted Otto Lode and his wife Köne membership of the monastery's spiritual confraternity. Rahvusarhiiv, 17 March 1418, EAA.854.2.413. By permission: National Archives of Estonia.

included in the monastery's fraternity (Fig. 3) and two years later, in 1420, the widow Lena Lode was accepted into the fraternity along with her sons.<sup>15</sup> The inscription of Gertrud's death over 70 years later into the calendar of deceased benefactors shows that members of the family continued to support the Birgittines at Mariendal.

By combining the different sources from the monastery, it is accordingly possible to study who Mariendal's benefactors were. The fraternity letters provide an important source material for their study.<sup>16</sup> In these letters, the general confessor and the abbess declared that one or several persons had been included in their fraternity as a token of appreciation for their good deeds towards the monastery. The members of the confraternity were granted the same spiritual favours as full members of the order and were termed as special friends and particular benefactors (*amicos speciales et benefactores praecipuos*) to Mariendal and the Birgittine Order. Thus, not all donors were automatically included in the confraternity; rather it was a favour granted only to the most distinguished friends of the monastery. Together with the calendar fragment, the fra-

15 *Est- und Livländische Brieflade* (henceforth *ELB*) no. 135/*LECUB* I:V 2645, 2939.

16 *LECUB* I:V 2210, 2485; I:VII 740; I:VIII 260; *DF* 5070.

ternity letters witness how the Birgittines in Mariendal actively remembered and appreciated their benefactors as friends of their monastery.<sup>17</sup> Such fraternity letters were also issued by other monasteries even though these letters have rarely been preserved. Nevertheless, Birgittine benefactors sometimes mention that they were members of a monastery's fraternity, by which they probably meant that they had received a fraternity letter of the same model as those from Mariendal.

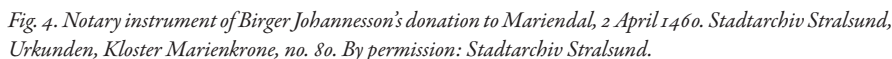
Persons who made pious donations to the Birgittines were primarily people living in the local communities, but at monasteries located near major trading cities, like Stralsund or Tallinn, the circle of benefactors could originate from the entire Baltic Sea region through merchants who endowed religious institutions at locations with which they had trading connections.<sup>18</sup> In 1460, a Danish man named Birger Johannesson, from the town Ronneby in Blekinge, donated a house that he owned on Fährstrasse in Stralsund to Marienkrone (*Fig. 4*). The revenue from the property would finance some spiritual services in the form of prayers, memorial masses, and vigils for his and his family's sake: first, he desired the Birgittine sisters and brothers to commemorate him and all his family faithfully in eternity through masses and other good deeds. For this purpose, he commissioned a weekly mass to be held at the altar of St Andrew in the church at Marienkrone. The priest holding the mass should hold it for Birger's father, mother, grandparents, children, and siblings in particular. Second, he stipulated that the Birgittines would inscribe him, his parents, and grandparents into the monastery's memorial book "according to the custom". Third, the Birgittines should begin the annual commemoration by holding vigils. The letter tells us that Birger knew the Birgittine practices and what kinds of commemoration they offered their benefactors. His request to be included in Marienkrone's memorial book (*Denckebock*) is interesting as this is the only reference to it among the sources from the monastery. Being inscribed in the memorial book could both function as a means of asserting that the Birgittines should not forget him, and as an indicator of social prestige, because his name would then be included in the list of prominent benefactors for whom the Birgittines at Marienkrone were expected to pray.<sup>19</sup> These were mainly people who belonged to the elite of Stralsund, connected to the members of the city council who founded the monastery in 1421.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Birger would be included in a list alongside locally promi-

17 Cf. Clark 2007, pp. 315–331.

18 Strega 2018, pp. 65–94; Jahnke 2019, pp. 7–41; Andersen 2014, pp. 205–230.

19 StAS UMarienkrone 80, 81.

20 Hågglund 2022, pp. 120–127; Lusiardi 2000, *passim*.



nent persons, including the dukes of Pomerania, who had taken the monastery under their protection.<sup>21</sup>

The commissioning of special masses for the entire family was a means of providing for the spiritual wellbeing of past, present, and future generations. However, such masses can also be understood as a gesture of appreciation towards a certain religious house to which the family was connected.<sup>22</sup> Birger Johannesson was not from Stralsund, but he owned a house in the city, which he gave to the Birgittines, and his donation would tie his and his family's memory to this location, for eternity, through the Birgittine prayers and masses. We do not know the nature of Birger's connections to Stralsund, but presumably he was involved in trade to the city, possibly with herring since the Scania and Blekinge regions, where Birger's hometown of Ronneby was located, were important coastal areas in the fish trade.<sup>23</sup> Birger's foundation of a mass at the altar of St Andrew in the Birgittine church supports this hypothesis, as the saint was patron of fishermen and fishmongers. His letter does not reveal why he chose to endow the Birgittines instead of any of the other parish churches of the city, but if St Andrew indeed was Birger's patron saint, this seems to be the probable reason why he chose to endow the Birgittine church which had an altar dedicated to the saint.<sup>24</sup> Birger's gift was furthermore not only a gift for the wellbeing of his own soul but also a gift for the sake of his family members, which indicates that he regarded the Birgittines at Marienkrone as an important institution to which he entrusted the care of the souls of his next of kin. His choice of donating to Marienkrone must thus also be understood as an expression of his wish to maintain a relationship with the monastery. There was no Birgittine monastery in the Blekinge and Scania region, but Birger was probably familiar with Vadstena, located 180 miles north of Ronneby, and the two Danish Birgittine monasteries of Maribo and Mariager. Marienkrone was located c. 200 miles south of Ronneby across the Baltic Sea. The fact that Birger owned property inside Stralsund must be the reason why he chose to endow the Birgittines there. Nonetheless, his donation shows that Marienkrone's location at Stralsund also brought benefactors from a longer distance who were connected to the town through trading connections.

Turning the focus to another part of the Baltic Sea region, to Nådendal, we can observe that the benefactor community there was primarily constituted of the local nobility in the parishes that neighboured the monastery, and the typical gift to Nådendal was a landed estate in such a neighbouring parish. Among the pious donations

21 Hoogeweg 1925, pp. 732–757. For the religiosity and social networks of Hanseatic merchants, see Jahnke 2012, pp. 165–182.

22 Wyszulek 2021, pp. 270–279.

23 Jahnke 2000, pp. 39–228.

24 *Revelaciones Extravagantes* (henceforth *Rev. Extr.*) 34.



to Nådendal, there are no foundations of masses or vigils, apart from one exception in 1485,<sup>25</sup> on behalf of the donors, which gives a slightly different character to the benefactor community here in comparison to, for example, Marienkrone from where several mass foundations are known. Instead, the Birgittine prayers were the primary service that Nådendal offered its benefactors. The majority of donations were to pay for the entry of a daughter into the monastery, and once becoming Birgittine sisters, the daughters of benefactors were expected to pray specially for the souls of their own family members. The benefactor community was thus also important to Nådendal in recruiting new members. Those benefactors who did not have a daughter to send to the monastery could provide for the entry of a woman whom they “adopted” as their own daughter and who would pray on their behalf inside the monastery.

On 16 June 1486, Lady Ingeborg Magnusdotter (Fleming) and her husband, Hartvik Japsson (Garp), donated one estate each to Nådendal for the sake of intercession and for the entry of two women into the monastery. They both issued a donation charter of their own and stated that the donation was to pay for the entry of a woman whom they adopted as their own daughter.<sup>26</sup> In Ingeborg’s letter, we learn that the couple had no children and that is why she gave the Luuspää estate as a payment for the well-born maiden Karin Nilsdotter’s entrance into Nådendal:

All honourable men who may come across this letter, I Ingeborg, Magnus Fleming’s daughter, cordially salute with our lord Jesus Christ, acknowledging to all with this open letter, that God almighty who is secretive in his judgement and mysterious in all his deeds, has decided as he sees fit, that I will not have my own children to live after me. I am although not only thinking of the good of my poor soul, but also of the souls of my dear forefathers as well as friends and relatives, whom I am owed and obliged to recompense. Now a few years ago, I wished me the wellborn maiden Karin Nilsdotter whom I gave as my own daughter into Nådendal’s monastery in eternal service of God, Virgin Mary and Saint Birgitta. As her prebend and sustenance, both for food and for clothing, I give and ascribe Luuspää estate in Paimio parish ...<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *DF* 4049.

<sup>26</sup> *DF* 4085–4086.

<sup>27</sup> “Alle dande men thetta breff kan forekoma helsar jak Ingeborgh, Magnus Flæmingx dotter, kerliga j varom herra Ihesu Christo, kungörendis allom met tesso myno öpno breffue, at medhen alzmectigh Gudh, huilkin lönlighen ær j synom domom ok vnderlighen j allom synom gerninghom, swa fiat hafuer ok hanom swa tekkis, at jak ey hafuer eighen barn effter mik at lefwa jach togh tenkendis ey eens vppa myne eighna fatighe siels gagn vtan jemvæl mynne kære forældraok flera vena och frændra siæla, for huilkom jach ægher ok plictoger ær goth at göra, nw fore nagre aar önskade jak mik velborna jomfrv Kadrin Nigles dotther ok swa som myna eigna dotter gaff in j Nاهدندals closter Gudhi, jomfrv Marieok sancte Birgitte til æwerdhe-ligha thiænisth, til huilkens prouenta ok vppeholdhe badhe til födho ok clædhe gifuer jach ok bebreffwar Lwsspæ godz, liggiendis j Pemara sokn (...)”; *DF* 4085.



*Fig. 5. The Birgittine church in Nådendal. Photograph: Anna-Stina Hägglund.*

According to the letter, Karin Nilsson had already stayed in the monastery for some years and maybe she now was ready to profess, which is why Ingeborg donated to pay for her entrance. It was clearly of importance for Ingeborg to give Karin to the Birgittines as her own daughter. Giving one's child to a monastery can be regarded as the most precious gift to give to the service of God. The gift of a child can thus also be interpreted as a symbol of generosity and affection towards the monastery.<sup>28</sup> For a per-

<sup>28</sup> Andersson 2006, pp. 148–164.

son like Ingeborg, who wanted to give a daughter to Nådendal but had no daughter of her own to give, it was a good alternative to adopt another woman as her own daughter to send to the Birgittines. As a sister in the monastery, the “adopted” daughter was expected to pray specially for Ingeborg and her next of kin and her friends. The donation also emphasizes the importance of the living to care for the souls of their deceased loved ones.

Ingeborg’s husband Hartvik Japsson, who was lawman (*lagman*) in the Norrfinne jurisdiction, gave an estate in the same manner for the entry into the monastery of a woman named Anna Mattisdatter, whom he also gave as his own daughter to the monastery. Just like his wife, Hinrik also wished his family and friends to be included in the prayers of Anna and the Birgittines among “other friends of God and benefactors” of Nådendal.<sup>29</sup> Hartvik’s donation expresses his active wish to participate in the Birgittine circle of friends. His predecessor as lawman in Norrfinne, Henrik Klasson (Diekn), was one of the founders of Nådendal and he, together with his wife Lady Lucia Olofsdatter (Skelge), had donated the estate upon which the monastery was built in 1442 (*Fig. 5*).<sup>30</sup> Apart from being a generous donor to Nådendal, Henrik Klasson was also often present on site in the monastery to seal donation charters and other matters concerning the monastery’s landed property. As his successor, Hartvik Japsson continued along the same lines and he is one of the persons who, apart from being a donor, is most frequently mentioned among the sealers in the charters from the monastery. Hartvik and Ingeborg were thus probably familiar with the other benefactors and Hartvik’s statement in his letter of donation displays that he and his wife wished to be included as donors among this group of people.<sup>31</sup>

#### GIFTS FOR FRIENDSHIP: BEQUESTS DIRECTED TO BIRGITTINE SISTERS AND BROTHER

The most common type of gifts to the Birgittines were landed property or smaller and larger sums of money. Some donors, however, gave more personal items, in the form of books, pieces of clothing, or jewellery. Such personal gifts could either be directed towards the whole monastic community or to individual sisters or brothers, even though the *Regula Salvatoris* prohibited personal belongings. With permission from the abbess, some possessions were nevertheless allowed, such as books and items

29 “...j blandh andra Gudz vener ok theris velgörare ...”; *DF* 4086.

30 *DF* 2465.

31 *DF* 4085, 4086.



needed to perform the religious work in the monastery.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the *Regula Salvatoris* was strict regarding the interaction between Birgittine sisters and persons outside their convent. They were only allowed to speak with relatives through a grilled window in the parlour of their convent on Sundays and saints' feast days, between nine o'clock and vespers, and always with permission from the abbess and accompanied by another sister.<sup>33</sup> The walls of the monastery were thus not as impermeable as one might think, as the Birgittine nuns could interact with people outside the monastery both by letter and by the conversations at the parlour window. The small personal gifts from relatives and friends can also be interpreted as a link stretching between a sister in the convent and a person on the outside. The gifts of personal items that some donors gave to individual Birgittine sisters may, at first glance, seem as contradictory to the rule, but investigated more thoroughly, these gifts always consisted of such objects that the Birgittines needed for their spiritual work.

Personal gifts directed towards friends and relatives inside the monasteries are typically recorded through wills rather than through charters of property donations. One testator who gave personal bequests to Birgittine sisters in Nådendal was the aforementioned lady, Lucia Olofsdotter. In all three versions of her will, issued over the period 24 December 1449–2 May 1455, she gave a gold ring "to Sister Klara in Nådendal". In her third and last version of the will, apart from the ring given to Sister Klara, she also gave another gold ring to Sister Cristin, daughter of the nobleman Olof Asserson. Why did Lucia give gold rings to two Birgittine sisters? The gifts were probably given as a token of friendship because neither of the two women seems to have been related to Lucia.<sup>34</sup> An explanation for her bequests is perhaps found in the *Regula Salvatoris*, which required that every Birgittine sister was to receive a plain gold ring symbolizing her marriage to Christ during the ritual of profession. Since the rings that Lucia gave were not described as containing any ornaments, they were presumably made of plain gold. However, Sister Klara was assigned the gold ring in 1449 and was still assigned the gold ring in 1455 when Lucia made the last version of her will. The problem with testamentary bequests is that they are to be understood as a promise of a gift that will be transferred to the recipient at a later point, and not immediately. Lucia died as late as in 1498, which means that many of those persons whom she had included as recipients of testamentary bequests in 1455 were already dead. It is thus uncertain if the two sisters in Nådendal ever received the rings. Indeed, the rings could have been given to them upon the making of the will, although this is not explicitly mentioned.

<sup>32</sup> *Regula Salvatoris* (henceforth *RS*), ch. 16.

<sup>33</sup> *RS* 7.

<sup>34</sup> Klockars 1979, pp. 51, 72.

Whether the rings were given to the sisters or not is not as relevant in this context as Lucia's intentions in assigning the gifts to the two sisters in the first place. Lucia's gifts of the gold rings to the two women mirrors the personal ties between Birgittine sisters and their friends and relatives outside the walls of the convent.<sup>35</sup> Lucia was a generous benefactor of Nådendal who donated estates on several occasions to the monastery. As mentioned above, together with her husband she had also donated the estate upon which Nådendal was constructed.<sup>36</sup> Her testamentary bequests to the two Birgittine sisters demonstrate that she not only endorsed the monastery as a whole, but also created personal ties to its inhabitants.

The husband of Lady Lucia, the knight Henrik Klasson, also remembered the Birgittines with a personal item, in the form of a silver chain with a reliquary in the first and second versions of his will,<sup>37</sup> but he did not give any bequests to individual sisters or brothers in the monastery. Furthermore, both Henrik and Lucia donated landed property to the monastery in the final version of their wills along with a request to be buried inside the monastery's church. They also assigned some bequests to the Birgittine monasteries of Mariendal and Vadstena. As benefactors, Lucia and Henrik were thus distinguished as donors and supporters of the monastery on many levels.<sup>38</sup>

Another prominent Birgittine benefactor who also gave a gift to a Birgittine sister in her final will was the Danish noblewoman Elsebe von Putbus, whose family originated from the island of Rügen. Around 1432, she first joined the Birgittine community at Marienkrone in Stralsund before she transferred to Mariendal near Tallinn.<sup>39</sup> In the final version of her will that she made on 23 February 1444, she gave large sums of money to both Marienkrone and Mariendal, but she also gave the sum of one hundred Riga marks to a sister named Margaret in Mariendal. The gift of such a large amount of money to a sworn sister in the monastery seems quite irregular. However, the sum was possibly to function as Margaret's prebend to sustain her livelihood in the monastery.<sup>40</sup> Although the Birgittines could not possess personal wealth, they were assigned prebends for their sustenance and these were usually given when they professed.<sup>41</sup> Because Elsebe von Putbus lived her last years in Mariendal, she was well acquainted with the Birgittine sisters there. Her testamentary bequests to the Birgittines also indicate how persons with connections to the political elite endorsed the Birgittines region-

35 *DF* 2818, 2886, 2970; *RS* 9.

36 *DF* 2469, 3311, 4049, 4299.

37 For a discussion on the reliquary, see Lahti 2019, p. 361.

38 Klockars 1979, pp. 26–35, 106–124; Räsänen 2007, pp. 245–261.

39 StAS UMarienkrone 29, 30.

40 23 Feb. 1444, Svenskt Diplomatariums Huvudkartotek (henceforth *SDHK*) 24479.

41 Cf. StAS UMarienkrone 101; *DF* 2572, 2700, 3313.

ally. Elsebe's father was the knight Henning von Putbus who was seneschal (*drots*) to the Danish king Valdemar IV Atterdag. Through her father, Elsebe was acquainted with King Valdemar's daughter Queen Margaret (ruler of the Kalmar Union) who was a well known supporter of the emerging Birgittine Order and foundress of Maribo monastery on Lolland.<sup>42</sup> Through her husband, Albrecht Andersen (Eberstein), Elsebe inherited large estates in Estonia, and she subsequently donated all her Estonian estates to the Birgittines in Mariendal.<sup>43</sup> Her gifts are also good examples of how people in the upper nobility in the Scandinavian kingdoms supported the Birgittines politically, spiritually, and through personal ties to people in the monasteries. Through the cross-regional connections of such persons, Birgittine monasteries outside Sweden and Denmark could also receive lavish gifts.

The donations and testamentary bequests by Lucia Olofsdotter and Henrik Klasson as well as Elsebe von Putbus are examples of how prominent Birgittine benefactors endorsed the monasteries by giving their financial support, but also how they created personal bonds to persons in the monasteries. Like Elsebe, Lucia also spent her last years in Nådendal, the Birgittine monastery she had supported during her life. Thus, the most prominent benefactors not only supported the Birgittines through donating land or larger sums of money, but also through personal bonds to individual members of the monasteries and by spending the end of their days with the Birgittines.<sup>44</sup>

An important function that the Birgittine monasteries fulfilled was to care for elderly people who, through a donation for their sustenance in food and clothing, could stay in the monastery, but outside the enclosure. By living in the monastery, the elderly benefactors could participate in the daily spiritual services. In 1458, the widow Anna Jönsdotter donated an estate to Nådendal and wished to become a "lay sister" (*leek-syster*) and live according to the rule, but without taking vows due to old age and thus an inability to strictly adhere to the rule.<sup>45</sup> In this manner, she could live according to the Birgittine way of life together with other elderly benefactors, and the sources from Nådendal give insight into this practice. There are also further examples from Mariendal and Marienkrone of elderly people who stayed in the monasteries.<sup>46</sup> In this way they could arrange for their care, but also be close to the institution they had endorsed during their life and be buried within the precinct of the monastery when they died.

42 Rebas 1976, pp. 53–62.

43 *LECUB* I:VII 84; *ELB* 182; Kreem & Markus 2007, pp. 68–70.

44 *DF* 2918, 2970; *LECUB* I:VII 84.

45 *DF* 3073, 3108.

46 *LECUB* I:4 1946; I:14 348, 963; *LM* III no. 397; Archiwum Państwowe w Szczecinie, AKW 1772, fol. 29r.

As already discussed in the above-mentioned example of Birger Johannesson, not all Birgittine benefactors belonged to the nobility. Particularly at Marienkrone, most of the benefactors were wealthy Stralsund burghers who asked for prayers and masses from the Birgittines and, in some cases, a burial in the monastery. One person who maintained a close tie to Marienkrone and its inhabitants was the town magistrate Gerd Blome. He made his final will on 28 March 1472, in which he endowed most of the religious institutions in Stralsund, but the Birgittines in particular. He requested to be buried in the Birgittine church where he already had his gravestone. Having a gravestone made while still alive seems quite peculiar, but it is probably to be understood as him reserving a prime spot in the church. The will does not mention if it already was on display in the church or if the stone merely was stored in the monastery until the funeral. He also gave his best cloak and eight ells of grey cloth of fine quality to Marienkrone. Furthermore, he gave a psalter to the lay brothers and an additional book on devotional literature to the abbess and the prioress. Gerd also mentioned that he was a member of the lay fraternity at Marienkrone, by which he probably meant that the heads of the monastery had given him a fraternity letter and included him in all the spiritual favours of full members of the order. For this inclusion, he gave two barrels of beer annually to the Birgittine brothers and sisters for a supper. The gift can be interpreted as a gesture of friendship to the Birgittine community because Gerd had been granted membership in their fraternity. In return, he wished that the sisters and brothers would actively remember to pray for him. Thus, the repeated annual gift of beer could also be understood as a more or less subtle reminder to keep his memory alive in the monastery.<sup>47</sup>

#### THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN A BIRGITTINE NOVICE AND HER UNCLE

The gifts directed towards the members in the Birgittine monasteries can accordingly be interpreted as gifts of friendship between the donor and the recipients, as well as a way for the benefactor to accentuate their appreciation for the intercessory prayers that the Birgittines performed. This however should not be simply considered a one-way transmission of gifts and appreciation. Corine Schleif and Volker Schier, who have studied the Bavarian Birgittines, have stressed the importance of family networks through the letters written by Sister Katerina Lemmel at Maria Mai monastery in Maihingen. Her letters give a rare glimpse into the economic reality of a new monastery in the Late Middle Ages. Katerina often wrote and thanked her cousin and his

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47 StAS Testamente I no. 0689.

family for donating to the monastery and she also thanked him for trying to convince her other cousins to make additional donations and financial contributions. In return for his help, Katerina promised to mention him and his family in the prayers and to participate in the daily prayers for the monastery's benefactors even more diligently. It can thus be seen that the family networks of the Birgittines were important to raise funds for their monastery. The promise of intercessory prayer was used to encourage their family and friends to make financial contributions.<sup>48</sup>

An excellent example from the Baltic Sea region of the interaction between a Birgittine sister and a relative are the three letters written in 1515 and 1516 by Sister Christina Magnusdotter in Nådendal to her uncle Pål Scheel who was provost at Turku Cathedral.<sup>49</sup> Christina thanked her uncle for his help and his fatherly love. Her letters have an adulatory tone that stresses her appreciation of the support from her uncle. In one of the letters, she asked him to send her some money because she had borrowed three marks in coins to buy some books from Vadstena. She assured Pål that the money would thus serve a pious purpose and not be spent on vain things.<sup>50</sup>

Christina's letters are unique as they render the voice of a Birgittine sister in Nådendal and reveal that she had frequent contact with her family, through visits as well as writing. Her letters provide examples of how the Birgittine sisters met the expectations of the family members by continuously assuring them that they included their next of kin in the daily prayers. Christina's letters reveal her affection to her uncle, as she repeatedly mentioned how often she prayed for him and that she was worried about his poor health.<sup>51</sup> Accordingly, she sent him some rye and butter from her food ration as she saw that he needed it more. Her gift is a curious example of a gift going in the other direction: from a sister living in the monastery to her relative on the outside. The gift was also an act of humility as Christina gave away her food allowance to her uncle who she saw needed it more. At the time that she wrote her letters, Christina was still a novice and she professed only a couple of years later, in 1517, when her mother paid her entrance fee in form of an estate in Askainen.<sup>52</sup> When Christina wrote her letters, she was thus not yet a full member of the monastery, and lived outside the enclosure, which is probably why she asked her relative for money, shoes, and other necessities.<sup>53</sup> Her letters also illustrate how contact with family members gave the people outside the monastery a glimpse into the daily life of the convent. The letters thus functioned

48 Schleif & Schier 2009.

49 *DF* 5799, 5830, 5843, 5852, 5908; Klockars 1979, pp. 164–165; Lamberg 2013, p. 163.

50 *DF* 5799, 5843.

51 *DF* 5852.

52 *DF* 5908.

53 *DF* 5852.

as a way to reassure family members and other benefactors that the Birgittines remembered their gifts and were continuing to pray on their behalf.

## CONCLUSIONS

This chapter focuses on the monasteries of Mariendal, Marienkrone, and Nådendal. All three were located in regions around the Baltic Sea that were economically, politically and ecclesiastically interconnected. This regional perspective gives an overview of the situation at the newly founded Birgittine monasteries in the 15th century. Even though the foundation processes varied and engaged different actors, the benefactor communities around the three monasteries have similarities as well as unique traits. The monasteries received many donations and testamentary bequests, but some individuals created closer ties to the Birgittines. Their bonds are manifested through different types of donations, both to the entire monasteries and to individual sisters and brothers. In exchange for their bequests, they requested prayers and memorial services on their behalf and on behalf of their families and friends.

The differences in the benefactor communities are determined by the socio-economic background of the benefactors and the location of the monasteries. Marienkrone was a distinguished urban monastery located just outside the city walls of Stralsund and was founded by the city council in 1421. In contrast, Nådendal was founded on a rural estate given by the Swedish Council of the Realm. This monastery had accordingly a more rural character and was mainly supported by the local nobility who resided in the neighbouring parishes. Mariendal's position was reflected in the political circumstances of northern Estonia and influenced by the political interests of both the Scandinavian rulers, the Teutonic Order, and the Hanseatic League. The benefactors of Mariendal were local nobles, burghers in Tallinn and, as in the case of Elsebe von Podebusk, people with connections to the Scandinavian royalty.

Regardless of location, the Birgittine benefactor communities across the region fulfilled the same function in caring for the souls of benefactors, housing elderly people, and preaching to the laity. But depending on location, the social and geographical origin of the benefactors varied. Marienkrone's vicinity to Stralsund, which was an important trading city in the Hanseatic network, thus brought it benefactors among tradesmen from other locations—as in the case of Birger Johannesson's donation. Nådendal's benefactors came mainly from the neighbouring parishes, but they created bonds on several levels to the monastery by donating to it as a whole, giving smaller bequests to individual sisters, requesting a burial in the church, and spending their last years in the monastery—as illustrated by the example of Lucia Olofsdotter. Mariendal's location in northern Estonia brought the monastery into the politics around the

estates formerly pertaining to the Danish nobility in Estonia, and this is the reason why the widow Elsebe von Podebusk gave the estates that she had inherited from her husband to the Birgittines. Her interest in the Birgittines can possibly also be connected to her family ties to the Danish rulers and Queen Margaret, who was a renowned Birgittine supporter.

The Birgittine benefactor communities thus encompassed both people of more modest background and persons belonging to high nobility. Regardless of social background, they donated their assets in exchange for intercessions performed by the Birgittine sisters and brothers. Some only donated to their local monastery, while other donors targeted monasteries across the region. These Birgittine circles consisted of mutual bonds where the Birgittines showed their appreciation towards their benefactors through granting them membership of their confraternity, inscribing them into their records of benefactors, or holding special memorial masses. Birgittine women in particular formed an important link between the monasteries and the benefactors, since the sisters kept contact with their families after joining the order. To conclude, the monasteries were dynamic hubs in the local society, and they filled the important duty of maintaining the memory of deceased benefactors in their prayers.

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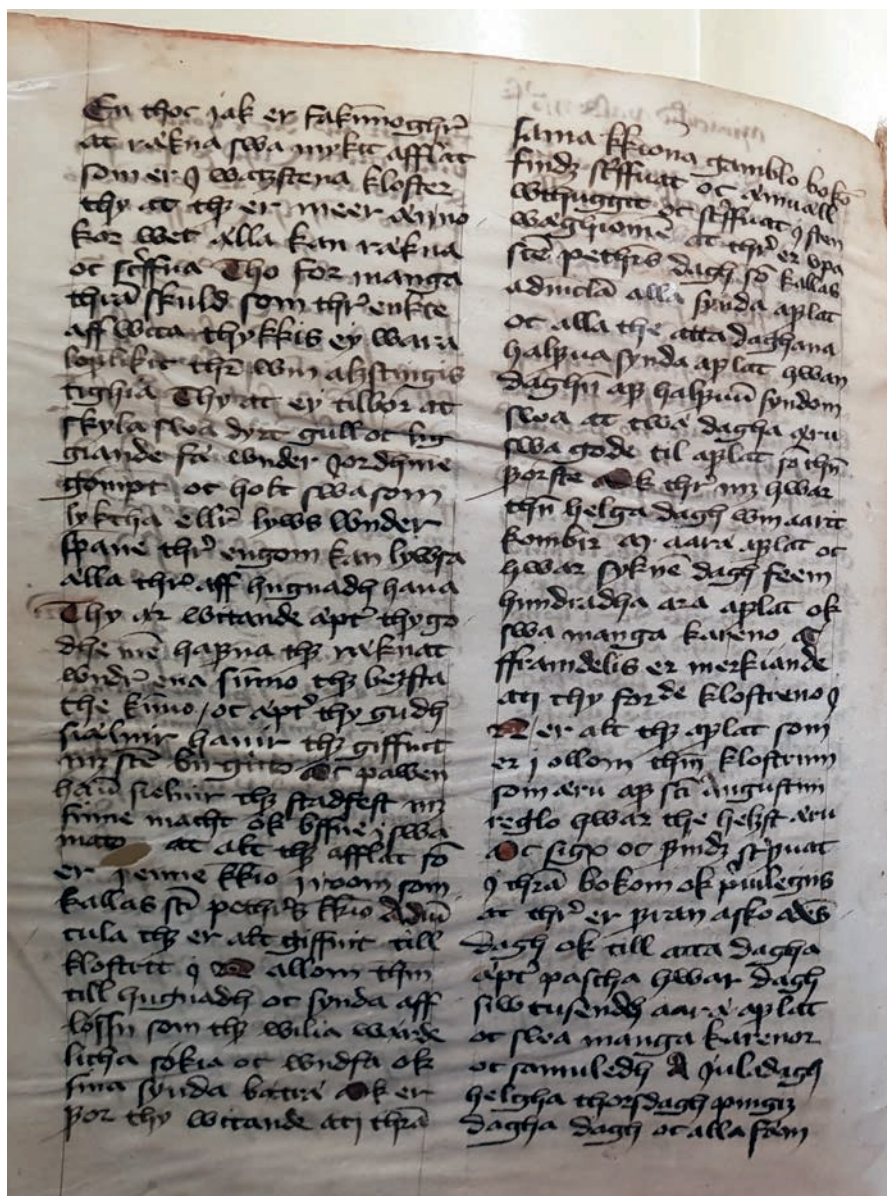


Fig. 1. The first page of a sermon on indulgence privileges at Vadstena. Shelf-mark MS C 504:VIII, Uppsala University Library. Photograph: Anna Fredriksson, Uppsala University Library.

ROGER ANDERSSON

## A Newly Discovered Old Swedish Sermon on Indulgences at Vadstena

This article is about a short text in Old Swedish on the indulgence privileges at Vadstena Abbey. It is argued that the text is best characterized as a sermon preached before an audience of pilgrims assembling there.

The importance of Vadstena Abbey as a place of worship at the end of the Middle Ages is very well attested indeed. The place saw numerous pilgrims arriving from afar, attracted by the vast indulgence privileges granted to the abbey. Many believers had also been required in confession to go to Vadstena to pray, make sacrifices, and pay tribute to Birgitta; they must have been attracted by the hundreds of miracles performed by the saint. Others were enticed by the assiduous preaching of the priest brothers because their sermons both scrutinized the sins of the people and made wonderful promises for the future.

One day in particular, the feast of St Peter Ad Vincula (1 August), was renowned for the preaching held for visiting pilgrims. The main reason for this is the vast number of indulgences granted on this day. In Book Four, chapter 137 of the Revelations of St Birgitta of Sweden, Christ tells Birgitta to visit Urban V (Pope 1362–1370) and to tell him that the future abbey church at Vadstena had been granted the same indulgences as those belonging to the church of San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. These indulgences received their formal approval in 1378 by Urban's successor Gregory XI.<sup>1</sup>

A considerable number of sermons for this particular day of the ecclesiastical year still survive. No systematic analysis of these sermons exists to date, but a good number of preliminary observations have been made, and the assumption is that these writ-

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1 The complicated history of the indulgences at Vadstena is treated extensively in Höjer 1905, esp. pp. 97–99, 145–149, 173–181, 211–223.



ten sermons provide a fairly good reflection of the actual preaching that took place in Vadstena.<sup>2</sup> There are also transcribed eyewitness accounts preserved. When the relics of Birgitta were brought back to Sweden, having been transferred from Rome to Vadstena in 1373 and 1374, one of the first priest brothers at Vadstena Abbey, Johannes Gjurderi, more commonly known as Johannes Præst, is said to have “preached excellently and with the highest and utmost devotion every day of Lent to the people coming in crowds from all parts of the land”.<sup>3</sup> Another witness is found in a treatise from c. 1400 composed by an anonymous Franciscan friar, who declares that the people who gathered in Vadstena “were very roused by their [i.e., the priest brothers’] assiduous preaching ..., since they did not pamper the vices but blamed them sternly; so much so, that the people said they had never heard such things, and had not known before that vices were so displeasing to God”.<sup>4</sup> A shipwrecked Venetian sailor, Pietro Querini, made the journey all the way to Vadstena from an isolated island in Lofoten in northern Norway mainly because of the indulgences provided at Vadstena. Arriving there, he was struck by the huge number of people who had gathered, people from Scandinavia, Germany, Holland, and Scotland.<sup>5</sup> At the most solemn feast of them all, the translation of the relics of St Katarina in 1489, the abbey church, according to the account written by the priest brother Nicolaus Ragvaldi, “was not locked at night, because the pilgrims sought indulgences during the night; they feared that they would not otherwise be able to enter the church the day after because of the crush of people”.<sup>6</sup>

A new contribution to this scholarship is now provided by a short text which was discovered in 2019 among some uncatalogued fragments in Uppsala University Li-

2 Borgehammar 1995; Hallqvist 2019. Borgehammar estimates that the number of preserved Ad Vincula sermons written by Vadstena brothers is close to one hundred (1995, p. 94).

3 “[...] egregie predicauit plebi ex omnibus finibus terre cateruatim venienti cum summa et maxima deuocione.” UUB, MS C 270, fol. 156v, quoted from *MHUU* 3 (1990), p. 233 (my translation).

4 “Magis accensus est populus propter instanciam predicationis eorum. [...] Quia vicia non palabant sed grauitur arguebant, ita quod populus diceret se numquam audiuisset talia nec sciuisset antea, quod vicia tantum Deo displicerent.” Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library, MS 114, fol. 22v. On this treatise see Andersson & Borgehammar 1997, p. 213 and Sahlin 2001, pp. 192–211 (esp. pp. 192–194). Translation from Andersson & Borgehammar, 1997, p. 213.

5 “Giunti in Vastena la uigilia del perdono trouamo nel ver un concorso d’innnumerabili persone di diverse nationi molti caualieri con le loro famiglie passati di Dacia luoghi distanti oltre miglia 600, altri d’Alemagna, d’Olanda, Scotia che son oltre il mare, similmente di Noruegia, Suetia assai genti venute per terra.” Quoted from Höjer 1908, p. 101.

6 “... och læstis kyrkian ey igen om the nattena, uthan almogen før stoora aflatzenss skul søker sitt aflat om nattena tvekandes om the i kyrkiona komma kunde dagen næst effter før trangh skuldh.” Quoted from Fritz & Elfving 2004, p. 43.

brary (*Fig. 1*).<sup>7</sup> It is a parchment fragment, the main content of which is an apparently hitherto unknown text in Old Swedish. Its relevance here is because it seems to refer to the topic of indulgence privileges at Vadstena Abbey. My preliminary transcription was used by Katarina Hallqvist in her Master's thesis in practical theology. Hallqvist makes an analysis of the text in relation to the Vadstena brothers' sermons for pilgrims on the feast of St Peter Ad Vincula.<sup>8</sup>

The fragment consists of three leaves. The Old Swedish text begins on the first column on the verso side of the first leaf (fol. 1va) and ends on the verso side of the third leaf (fol. 3va). It is written in two columns (designated *a* and *b*) with between 29 and 34 lines per column, not counting the last column where the text ends after only 14 lines. Seemingly, it is written by a single scribe, however with a probable change of pen at line 1 in the second column of the verso side of the second leaf (at fol. 2vb).

There are a few scribal corrections in the text. On fol. 2ra, "Ther høre" is corrected from "Ther fore" ["Therefore"]. On fol. 2vb, the word "afslas" was first written "afsas" with letter *l* added. On fol. 3ra, the word "dodhelika" is corrected from "doghe-". The erroneous "doghe-" may be influenced by the immediately following "dwgher". These corrections are indeed quite insignificant and are not the kind of scribal errors that can only be explained as misunderstandings of an Old Swedish exemplar. So, there is nothing to contradict that this might be the original Old Swedish text.

The text itself provides no dating, but it must have been written after the explicitly mentioned approval of the indulgence privileges in 1378. In fact, it must have been written after the erection of the walls of the abbey church at Vadstena (after half a century of construction work, the church was finally consecrated in 1430), since explicit reference is made in the text to an inscription on one of the walls. Nor does the text give any information about its author, place of original composition, nor where this actual copy was produced. There are, however, strong links to Vadstena Abbey and it certainly looks like a typical Vadstena manuscript, but there is no solid proof that it was actually written there. Yet again, it may have been written there but copied from an exemplar written elsewhere. Or it may altogether have been written outside the abbey.

7 Research librarian Dr Anna Fredriksson was the one who first brought my attention to the fragment and kindly sent me photographs. The fragment has been incorporated into the collection of medieval manuscripts in Uppsala University Library, as MS C 504:VIII.

8 Hallqvist 2019. A slightly abridged version of this thesis was subsequently published in Hallqvist 2020.



Despite the unambiguous links to the monastery, there are indications that the author was not part of the Vadstena religious community. The Vadstena brothers are referred to in the third person, something which suggests an author from outside the abbey:

atj **thera** sama *kirkiona* gamblo bokom [that in the old books of **their** church] (§4)

j **thera** bokom ok priuilegiis [in **their** books and privileges] (§6)

On the linguistic and palaeographical levels, there are a few minor features that may give us further clues. Without a doubt, the language is normal Old Swedish, but noticeable forms are “ollom” [“all”] (§5), “eingin” [“no one”] (§16) and “kerleik” [“love”] (§19). The former has initial *o* as a result of u-umlaut and is the normal form in West Norse in contrast to the Old Swedish form “allum” which does not display this umlaut. The two latter forms have a characteristically West Scandinavian diphthong (*ei* instead of the long monophthong *e* found in Old Swedish). These are exceptions, but such features appear in other manuscripts as well, and in the 19th century scholars coined the term Birgittine Norwegian for this type of language mixture where Old Swedish appears with occasional (or frequent) Norwegian features. It has been discussed if this Birgittine Norwegian was in fact a high-prestige variety, possibly a result of the establishment of the Birgittine Order in Scandinavia. It has also been argued that it may be the result of Norwegian scribes visiting Sweden and copying or adapting Old Swedish texts, originating in Vadstena.<sup>9</sup> Be that as it may, these types of linguistic interference do seem to have something to do with travelling people or travelling texts. And pilgrims are by nature travellers. In the beginning of the text (§§1–7), the particular form of the grapheme *f*, known as insular *f*, is used exclusively, except when geminated. This form is common in Norway, until it falls out of use towards the end of the 15th century, but hardly ever occurs in Eastern Scandinavia. In the rest of the text, the distribution between the two forms is more even.

This is an anonymous text from the 15th century; it is written in close connection with Vadstena Abbey, but probably not *in* the abbey and probably not by any of the Vadstena brothers or sisters. There are a couple of palaeographic and linguistic features pointing in the direction of contact with Western Scandinavia. The fact that the text is almost entirely about indulgence privileges and the sacrament of penance suggests that such contacts may very well have been travelling pilgrims. The text meets us in the form of a short booklet consisting of six pages. It may have belonged to a larger manu-

9 An excellent survey of the scholarship on this field is provided in Adams 2015, pp. 42–70.

script, but this is difficult to ascertain. It may also have circulated in the form of this little booklet. Now we need to try to establish with what kind of text we are dealing.

The text begins with an attempt by its author to provide an account of the topic of indulgence privileges, including numerous comments about how little he knows about the subject. I use the masculine form *he*, because I believe it is more probable that this is a male author or scribe. He also refers to other privileges, those that were granted for all churches of the Augustinian Order, wherever they are located. After a rather neutral enumerating of the number of days devoted to different feasts and periods of the ecclesiastical year, the textual voice starts to make some considerable exaggerations, including remissions of penitence amounting to no fewer than several thousands of years, numbers that are much larger than those we encounter in the officially approved documents. As Hallqvist points out, the numbers are still slightly inferior to those appearing later, at the beginning of the 16th century, when a veritable inflation of remissions of penitence are granted, up to more than a hundred thousand years.<sup>10</sup>

The author refers (§4) to an inscription on the wall of the abbey church itself (“*oc æmuæll wthuggit oc scriffuat j sten wæghiomen*” [“and even cut out and written on the stone walls”]), an inscription rendering precisely those privileges, according to the words Christ spoke to Birgitta in Book Four, chapter 137, of her Revelations (see *Fig. 2*). This, he claims, is a guarantee for a full indulgence (Plenary) for pilgrims visiting Vadstena on 1 August, that is a full forgiveness and a full remission of penitence. Hallqvist has shown that the Vadstena privileges may not in fact have had such powers.<sup>11</sup>

In the second part of the fragment text (from §8), the author turns to the poor people who are ignorant about the Sacrament of Penance or how indulgence is to be acquired. If a sinner truly repents and makes a sincere confession with the will and intention of never again returning to sin, and then visits those places where indulgence is granted, then the eternal pain he or she should suffer in hell is transformed into a pain (in purgatory) that has an end, a limitation in time.

In the final section of the text (from §16), the author uses much effort to convey the central teaching that no good deed shall be left without reward: “*engin godgerning skall wara wtan aterløn*”. However, if a good act is performed with the intention to continue sinning or in the state of mortal sin, it may still result in a reward in this life in the form of worldly possessions or a long life. But from the eternal perspective, only such deeds are good which are performed with true contrition and with the intention never to fall back into sin. The text is aimed at a non-learned, ordinary audience of lay people, in contrast to the wise men who are well informed in theological matters.

10 Hallqvist 2019, p. 87; see also Fröjmark 2015, p. 81.

11 See the discussion in Hallqvist 2019, pp. 34–37; 2020, pp. 48–49.

The question of the text's genre is difficult. It would be logical to characterize it as a sermon, given the prominent place preaching had in connection with pilgrimages to Vadstena in the 15th century. This is basically the conclusion Hallqvist reaches when she speaks about the text as a short sermon or announcement on indulgence which could be used by parish priests.<sup>12</sup> But in other respects, our text does not quite look like a normal written sermon. It is not based on a sacred text, it is not connected to a liturgical occasion, and it does not have the clearly indicated structure that most other written sermons have.<sup>13</sup>

However, the text contains other, more sermon-like features. At the beginning of the text, the author refers to himself and his failings: "En thoc jak ær fakun̄noghír" ["even though I am ignorant"]. This is quite common in preaching where preachers sometimes emphasize their shortcomings as religious orators. This oratorical strategy stretches far back in the history of rhetoric and preaching.<sup>14</sup> The text also ends like a sermon with the optative appeal to God and ending with the Amen. Moreover, a comment about the rhetorical style should be added. This is sometimes somewhat difficult to detect in the text, but at a closer inspection it is definitely there: the author repeatedly emphasizes central teachings with inferred "exclamation marks". Obviously, these are not written out, but if one reads the text aloud the emotive tone in the oral discourse is certainly there. He both instructs the audience, tries to attract them with promises of significant remissions of penitence, and frightens them with threats of what will happen if good deeds are performed for the wrong purpose. I am inclined to call this text a sermon, even though it is not cast in the neatly structured way in which the majority of written sermons are organized.

Besides the Old Swedish text of the fragment, it has Latin text on fol. 11r, namely a short piece with the heading on the top of the page reading 'Miraculum valde notabile' ['A very remarkable miracle']. We must now ask if there is any connection between the Latin *Miraculum* and our sermon.

To begin with, both the Old Swedish text and Latin text appear to be written by the same hand. It is sometimes difficult to compare medieval handwriting in different languages, but the general impression clearly speaks in favour of an identification. It

12 Hallqvist 2019, p. 85; 2020, p. 58. Hallqvist compares the text with a similar but longer sermon on Ad Vincula privileges written at Syon Abbey (2019, pp. 90–93; briefly 2020, pp. 58–59).

13 A widespread definition of the sermon is the one proposed by Beverly M. Kienzle, who sees the sermon as an "oral discourse performed by a preacher to an audience for the purpose of instruction and exhortation on a topic concerned with faith and morals and based on a sacred text" (Kienzle 2000, p. 151). A broader discussion is provided in O'Mara & Paul 2007, pp. xxvi–xxxiii, with emphasis also on sermons in the vernacular.

14 See, for example, Murphy 1974, p. 308; Wenzel 2015, pp. 55–56.

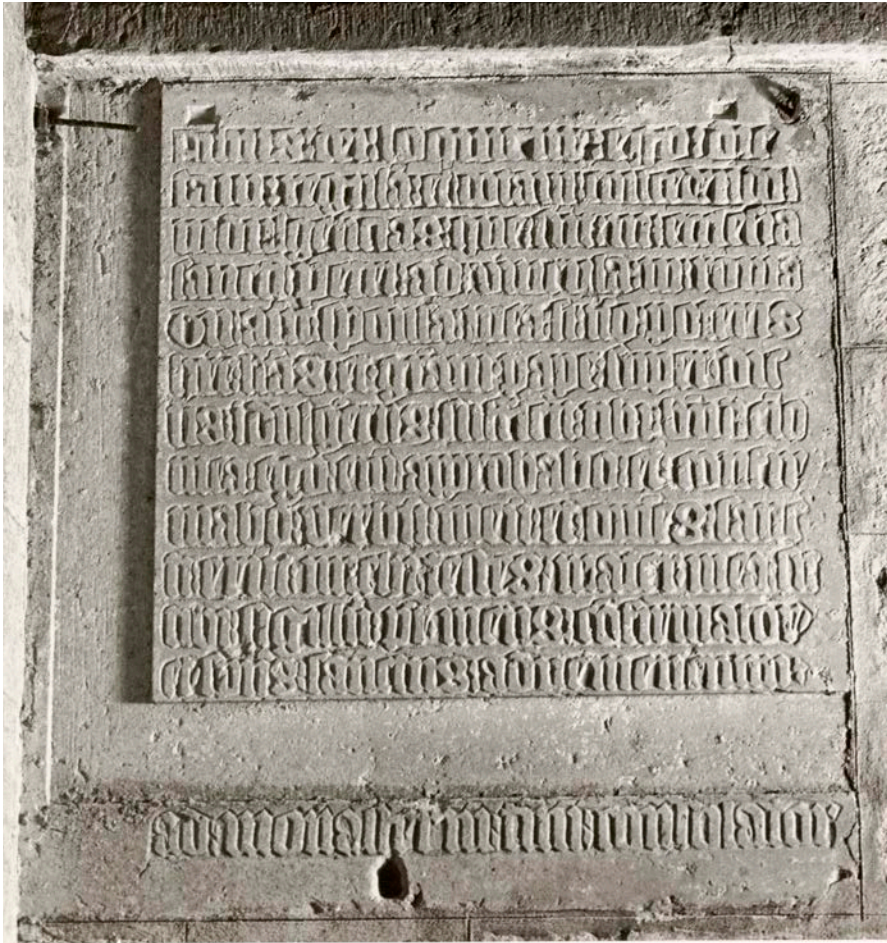


Fig. 2. Inscription on the southern wall of Vadstena Abbey, in which the revelation on indulgence privileges (Rev. IV:137) is quoted. Reference to this inscription is made in the sermon on indulgences discussed in the article, see §4 of the Old Swedish text. Photograph: Rolf Hinze, Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet (ATA), (CC BY 2.5 SE).

should be added that several individual letter forms are identical, for example, lower case *g*, with its characteristic long stroke to the left below the line.

The Latin text proves to be an extract from the work *Speculum mortis* composed in 1458 by Bernhard von Waging, a 15th-century Benedictine monk (d. 1472). It is about a pope on his deathbed. The pope tells his chaplain to read three Lord's Prayers for his soul: one in honour of the agony of Christ, another in honour of the bitterness of the

passion of Christ, the third in honour of the ineffable love of Christ. This the chaplain did, and after his death, the pope returned in full splendour and assured that he had been much helped by the chaplain's prayers.

It is not the contents of this story (it is a quite normal preaching exemplum) that interests us here, but its connection to the sermon. The fact that it is placed right next to the main text, the sermon, may lead to the assumption that it was meant to have a function in a preaching situation. Placing exempla in immediate connection to model sermons in which they should be used is quite normal practice in the Vadstena preaching manuscripts.<sup>15</sup> And the fact that one of the texts is written in Latin, and the other in Swedish does not necessarily pose any problems. Late medieval religious churches or monasteries were bilingual environments, and texts functioning in the context of an oral genre such as the sermon could appear in either language, and easily be transformed from one to the other, given the often bilingual competence of the priests.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, it is probably safe to assume that the text is a sermon on the indulgences with an accompanying exemplum on the topic of death and the welfare of the soul after death. What could be more appropriate for a sermon directed to pilgrims visiting Vadstena on the most important day of pilgrimage of that abbey? Even though this exemplum about the pope follows the normal pattern, it is not recorded in other sources in the library at Vadstena Abbey, as far as available indices can tell. Nor are other works by Bernhard von Waging collected there. Who was Bernhard von Waging?

Bernhard was a representative of the so-called Melker Reform, which was a reform movement within the Benedictine Order in the second half of the 15th century, mainly in present-day Austria and Bavaria.<sup>17</sup> The general aim of the movement was criticism of both the secularization of the monastic life and misconduct in the monasteries. Monastic life needed to be renewed and there was a need for a stronger and more austere observance of the Benedictine Rule. In addition, the Melker Reform was characterized by the advancement of scientific work in the spirit of humanism, and indeed, the monastery at Melk had close contacts with the University of Vienna, where Bernhard von Waging had studied. His theology is oriented towards three major themes: the contemplative life (*vita contemplativa*), mysticism, and ascetics; he was also a productive preacher and authored no fewer than almost a hundred sermons.<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, we have a small booklet with something that looks like a sermon with an accompanying exemplum with connections to a late medieval monastic reform move-

15 Andersson & Borgehammar 1997, p. 228; Andersson 2001, pp. 125–128.

16 Andersson 2021.

17 On Bernhard von Waging, see Treusch 2011.

18 Treusch 2011, pp. 66–69.



ment. The topic of this sermon is the indulgence privileges at Vadstena. The preacher strives to explain to his audience the benefits of these privileges, and the need to confess and repent before it is too late. The feast of St Peter Ad Vincula was certainly a suitable setting for such a sermon; the place crowded with pilgrims, perhaps terrified of the prospect of a catastrophic hereafter, but now again reassured by the promises of huge indulgences. Preachers involved in this sphere could rightfully be called preachers of repentance, and in our text we perhaps meet one of them, even though the text has little of the rhetoric of frightening and threatening people, and no explicit references to the Day of Judgement.

The discovery of previously unknown texts in Old Swedish is very rare in itself. Apart from this, it is my hope that this new find has contributed to the understanding of indulgence practices at Vadstena. The voice that speaks to us in the written text allows us to get an impression of the preacher's actual address to the gathering pilgrims.

Below, a transcription of the Old Swedish text is given together with a rather free translation into English. The transcription has been standardized in a few respects in order to facilitate understanding of the content for the readers. Paragraph numbers and modern punctuation have been introduced, while rubrication, lineation, word division across lines (including hyphenation), paraps and virgulae are ignored. More significant scribal corrections are recorded in footnotes. Abbreviations have been expanded and italicized. Guided by forms written out in full by the scribe, the vowel in the *i/e(r)*-abbreviation is expanded *i* in words such as “gitir”, “dagir” and *e* in words such as “her”, “fornempde”, “breffue”.

#### THE OLD SWEDISH TEXT

[*iva*] 1 En thoc jak er fakunzoghír at rækna swa mykit afflat som er j Watzstena kloster, thy at *thet* er meer æn nokor wet ælla kan rækna oc scriffua, tho for manga thera skuld som ther enkte aff wita thykkis ey wara loflikit ther wm alzstingis tighia. 2 Thy at ey tilbør at skyla swa dyrt gull oc liggiande fæ wnder jordhizne gømpit oc holt swa som lyktha eller lyws wnder spanne, ther engom kan lywsa ælla ther aff hugnadh haua. 3 Thy ær witande, æptir thy godhe *men* hafua *thet* ræknat wndir ena summo *thet* bezsta the kunno, oc æptir thy Gudh siæluir hauir *thet* giffuit *medh sancte* Birgitto, oc pawen hauir sieluir *thet* stadfest *medh* sinne macht ok breffue, j swa mato, at alt *thet* afflat som er j enne kirkio j Room, som kallas *sancti* Pethers kirkio Aduincula, *thet* er alt giffuit till klostrit j N, allom them till hugnadh oc synda affløssn som *thet* wilia wærdelicha sökia oc wndfa ok sina synda bætra. 4 Ok er for thy witande atj thera [*ivb*] sama kirkionna gamblo bokom findz scriffuat, oc æmuæll wthuggit oc scriffuat j sten wæghiomen, at ther er vpa *sancte* Pethers dagh som kallas Aduincula alla synda aflat oc alla the atta daghana halfua synda aflat, hwan daghin

af halfuuum syndom, swa at twa dagha æru swa gode til aflat *som* then første. 5 Ok ther *medh* hwar then helga dagh wm aarit kombir M. aara aflat, oc hwar syknæn dagh feem hundradha ara aflat ok swa manga kareno. Fframdelis er merkiande atj thy fornempde klostreno j N er alt *thet* aflat, som er j ollom them klostrum som æru af *sancti* Augustini reglo, hwar the helzst æru. 6 Oc sigx oc findz *scrifuat* j thera bokom ok *pruilegiis*, at ther er fran asko *odensdagh* ok till atta dagha æptir pascha hwar dagh siw tusendh aaræ aflat oc swa manga karenor. Oc samuledh a juladagh, helgha thorsdagh, pingiz dagha dagh oc alla fæm [27a] warfru dagha oc *sancti* Augustini dagh, wm høstiin kombir, oc atta dagha æptir hwan thera samuledh siw tusand aar oc swa manga karenor. 7 Oc wm then warfru daghin, vm fastona kombir, sigx at aflatit lopir æn høgræ æn fiortan tusand aar. Oc tha er afflatit en meer æn nw er saght, thy at engin findz *her* j wærlðinne som full wijs er at *thet* kan rätteligha rækna. 8 Nw er æn witande nokot litit at sæghia for enfaldagha *menniskio* skuld, ther ey forsta huat got afflat hauir at tydha, ælla till huat got *thet* ær fallit, ælla huat got *thet* gør *menniskionne*, ælla huru *menniskian* schall *thet* faa oc forthiæna. Ther høre<sup>19</sup> till wisom oc sniællom mannom at swara, ok *thet* gitir man ey alt well *scriffuat* swasom til bór. 9 Tho er witande, *som* mestarena sigia, at nar som nokor [27b] *menniskia* hauir anger oc ydrugha for sina syndhe oc gaar til *scripta medh* the akt ok fulkomlika wilia at ey optar meer falla j dødhelica synd sielf wiliande, wtan will sik gerna bætræ, tha till høre henne afflatit j sua matto, 10 at mædhan hon hauir giort manga groffua ok otalika syndhe, stora ok sma, oc lathir sik *thet* *angra* ok *scripta* sik rettelligha, ok søke the stadhe som afflat gifz, tha wmskiptis the pinan som han skulde hafua haft æwerdelica j heluite wtj ena andra pino som ændas, *thet* er the plictin oc the bættringhin manne sætzs j *scripta* malom for sina syndhe. 11 Ok for thy at enghin prester plægir nokrom sætia j *script* swa mykit som honom burde at hawa for sina synde, som æru dødhelicha synde, for thy at for hwaria [27a] ena dødhelica syndh, swa opta *menniskian* gør ena aff dødhelikom syndom, tha burde henne siw ara *script*. 12 Ok for thy at hon formaa ey at bætra som henne tilbør j the *script* henne burde haua, ther hielpir henne aflatit fore, wm hon *thet* søke *medh* retta akt sik at bætra, for thy at henne burde at wara j hardhum pino, skerslo elde, ther en dagir thyckis wara hundradhe ella thusanda aar. 13 Mædhan hon forma ey at bætra *her* j werldinne, ella gør sina plict sliolika ok hallir ther enkte aff, ella gløme atgøra sina bættring, som henne sætzs j *scriptamalom*, ther dughir henne afflatit fore j swa matto, at vm hon skulde haua brunnit ella warit j pina æptir sin dødth siw aar, thrætighi aar ella hun-[27b]-dradha ælla tusanda ælla siw tusanda ælla meer, som mange hafua forthiænt, 14 ok om hon gaar ok søker rettelica nakon then stadh som aflat lyses, j swa manga ara aflat ælla kareno som ther lyses vm hon er werdogh *thet* at faa, swa manga ara pina afslas<sup>20</sup> j skærslo elde, swa at

19 Corrected from *føre*.

20 Corrected from *afsas*; letter l added.



hon wardhír thes raskare quit af the pino hon schulde ther haffua tholt aff Gudz retwiso weghnæ for syna syndhe, som hon ey formatte ælla forsymethe hær at batra j werldinne. **15** Ok engin then lifuande er kan wita ælla forstaa huat dygdh aflat hauir ella hurw dyre ok got thet er ffor æn eftir dødhin. Wm han kombir i skærslø eldh, tha faar han røna ok wita, vm han hauir aflatit forthiænt, ella til huars thet dughir. Thet hauir meer ok større dygdh, æn minne fakunno er witerlikit [3ra] ella mōghelikit er at sigia ælla scrifua. **16** Oc er witande for wisso, at then som er j dōdhelicom syndhom, enne ælla flerom, ok swa lānge han er j henne staddir ok will sik ey rætta oc bættræ, ella hauir thet j wilia, at han wil meer synda, tha hielper honum enkte afflat ok einga godgerninga, swa at han fa ther faare hymerikis glædhi. **17** Vtan tho for thy at engin godgerning skall wara wtan aterløn, ma the godgerningin som nakor gør, j dōdhelikom syndhom staddir, ælla medh forakt at synda dōdhelika<sup>21</sup>, dwghir tha swa mykit, at han faar werlzlikin framgāng stundom efter sinom wilia, oc hauir werldz hugnadh j manga handa mato, ok fa ther fore stundom lankt liif oc rikedomā, oc ma han faa thes myndre pino j synom dōdz tima oc j heluite. [3rb] **18** Oc faa somlike sin aterløn hær j werldinne j swa matto for alla sina godgerninga, at tha the koma for Gudz dom, tha star them engin aterløn wtan heluitis pina for thera gerninga. Thy the wp baro her j werldinne af Gudz lōnlike rætuiso lōn fore<sup>22</sup> alt thet got the giordo. **19** For thy at the litlo god gerninga, som the stundhom giordho medh wranghe akt oc j dōdhelicha syndh, oc hafdo engin wilia sik nokon tima bættra widh Gudh ella sin iæmcristin, som the hafdo moot brutit, oc haua engin kerleik ella akt vpa at leta oc æruodha eftir Gudz nadh ok miskund, och skilia sik aff dōdhelikom syndom medh rættom synda angir ok bættring, ok them er enkte vm hymerikis fadirins landh. Wm the saa haua allan [3va] sin lusta oc wilia hær j werldinne, oc thet wtuæliæ the for hymerikis glædhi. **20** Oc er for thy rædhandhis ok ympnit wist, wm the ero j tolkom skipilssom at the wp bæra her j werldinne all sin lōn j iordhrikis forganlikom thinghom oc tapa thy wær for then schuld euerdelika blifwande hymerikis got thing. **21** Ther fore beware oss Gudh alzwaldogher æuerdeligha. Amen. A M E N

#### ENGLISH TRANSLATION

[1va] **1** Even though I am too simple-minded to calculate how much indulgence there is at Vadstena Abbey, because there is much more than anyone knows or can calculate or write down, for the sake of the many who know nothing about this, it does not seem commendable, however, to remain silent about it. **2** Because it is not fitting to conceal such precious gold or valuables hidden under the ground and kept like a lamp or a candle under a bucket which cannot provide light for anyone or comfort anyone. **3** It

<sup>21</sup> Corrected from doghelika.

<sup>22</sup> Expansion uncertain.

should be known that good men have calculated a sum as best they could, and God himself has granted this with St Birgitta, and the pope himself has confirmed it with his power and his letters in such a way that all indulgence that there is in a church in Rome called St Peter's Church Ad Vincula (San Pietro in Vincoli) is granted in its entirety to the monastery in N<sup>23</sup> for the consolation and forgiveness of sins for all those who seek and receive this and amend their sins on earth. **4** Therefore, it should be known that in the [*lvb*] old books of their church it is written and even cut out and written on the stone walls, that on the day of St Peter Ad Vincula there is a full indulgence and on the eight following days a half, meaning that two of the latter days are as good as the first. **5** And with this, on every feast day throughout the year comes one thousand years of indulgence and every weekday five hundred years and as many *carenae*. It should also be said that in the monastery at N there are the same indulgence privileges as in all the monasteries following the Augustinian rule, wherever they are located. **6** It is said and can be found written in their books and privileges that every day from Ash Wednesday until the Octave of Easter there is an indulgence of seven thousand years and as many *carenae*. And similarly for Christmas Day, Ascension Day, Pentecost, all five [*2ra*] feast days of Our Lady and St Augustine's Day in the autumn; and eight days after each of these similarly seven thousand years and as many *carenae*. **7** On Our Lady's Day that falls during Lent (Annunciation), it is said that the indulgence amounts to even more than fourteen thousand years and then the amount is even greater than now said, because there is no one here in the world who is wise enough to correctly calculate this. **8** Furthermore, something should be said for the sake of simple people who do not understand what good indulgence does, or for what reason it is granted, or what good it brings to people, or how people can receive and earn it. It is the task of the wise men to answer and it is impossible to write all that down properly as is fitting. **9** But it must be known that, as the masters say, when somebody shows [*2rb*] contrition and goes to confession with the will and the full intention never again to fall into mortal sin of his own will but is eager to amend his ways, then the indulgence is fitting for him, **10** in such a way that even though he has committed innumerable grave sins, great or small, and regrets and confesses correctly, and goes to those places where indulgence is granted, then the torment he would have suffered eternally in hell is transformed into another pain that will end, that is the penance for his sins he is imposed at confession. **11** And because no priest normally

23 Here and below (§5), the letter N suggests that the contents of this discourse could be adapted to other monasteries following the Augustinian rule (cf. §5); however, since Vadstena is both explicitly (§1) and implicitly (§§4–6) mentioned, there remains no doubt that the text is primarily meant to be communicated in Vadstena.

imposes as much penance as he should for his sins, that is mortal sins, each time [2va] a man commits one of the mortal sins, he should do penance for seven years. 12 And as he will not be able to amend fittingly through the penance that he ought to have, the indulgence will help, if he seeks it with the right intention to amend, because he ought to be in harsh torment in purgatory where one day feels like a hundred or a thousand years. 13 As he cannot make full amends in this world, or performs his chastisement in a slack way, and keeps nothing of it, or forgets to perform the penance that was given to him at confession, then the indulgence is beneficial in such a way that if he were to have burnt or been in torment after his death seven years, thirty years, one hundred [2vb] years or one thousand years or even more, as many people have deserved, 14 and if he seeks a place where indulgence is proclaimed, his torments in purgatory are reduced with as many years or *carenae* as are being proclaimed, if he is worthy of receiving it, so that he will be more quickly released of the pain he should, according to God's justice, have suffered for those sins he could have or failed to atone for here on earth. 15 No living person can know or understand the power that indulgence possesses or how precious and good it is, until after death. If he comes to purgatory, then he will experience and know whether he has earned the indulgence or what it is good for. It has further and greater power than I, a simpleton, understand [3ra] or can write about and tell of. 16 It should be known for certain that whoever is in the state of one or more mortal sins and as long as he remains in it and does not want to correct or amend, or has the desire to sin more, to him no indulgence can be of help and no good deeds for which he might receive the joys of heaven. 17 Because no good act shall be without reward, the good deed that someone performs while in the state of mortal sin or with the intention of committing a mortal sin can have such a good effect, that he sometimes receives worldly success according to his will and worldly joy in many ways and therefore enjoys a long life and wealth, and he will suffer less pain in his hour of death and in hell. [3rb] 18 And if some get their reward here on earth in this way for the sake of all their good deeds, then when they come before God's judgement, no other reward is meant for them but the pain in hell for their deeds They received in this world God's secret, just reward for all the good they did, 19 namely the small number of good acts they sometimes performed but with an evil intention and in the state of mortal sin. They had no will to ever make amends with God or their neighbour whom they had trespassed against! They have no love or intention to seek and work for the grace and mercy of God and separate themselves from mortal sin with true contrition of sins and intention to amend! They will have nothing to do with the land of the heavenly father, if they have all [3va] their delight and will in this world and choose that rather than the joys of heaven!

20 And therefore, it is to be feared and abundantly shown that, if they are in such a state, they receive here in this world all their reward in the vain things of this world and lose for that reason the eternal good things to come in heaven. 21 May God almighty save us from that!

Amen

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*Fig. 1. The Motalla buckle, 14th century, Paris, France. Diameter 19.4 cm, gold, precious and semi-precious stones. National Historical Museum, Stockholm, Sweden. Photograph: National Historical Museum, Sweden, (CC BY 2.5 SE).*



KATARINA HALLQVIST

## Growing for Paradise

### *Birgittine Guidance for the Mind's Eye in some Ad Vincula Sermons*

In 1818, a marvellous piece of jewellery was found in the Motala Ström river, at Kimstad, Östergötland, Sweden (*Fig. 1*). The gold and jewelled Motala buckle is an example of 14th-century Parisian craftsmanship, 19.4 cm in diameter and adorned with many different gems, in addition to some now lost pearls. Designed to resemble a gothic rosette, it was worn on the chest and used to fasten a mantle.

The usual interpretation is that the buckle had a worldly use that did not reach into the realm of religion, but after having reflected on some 15th-century Vadstena sermons, which are discussed below, I have arrived at an alternative interpretation. A piece of jewellery such as this might encourage the contemplative capability of medieval man and illuminate for us the representations of the unseen in late medieval spirituality, where the many gems represent the foundations of the Heavenly City and of faith. Adorned with fabulous golden beasts, the Motala buckle also bears moral admonitions, as do the stones themselves.<sup>1</sup> Similar to the way in which the buckle can be interpreted to hold spiritual significance, this article analyses the antiphony between

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1 Dora Jane Janson suggests that buckles like this originate from the Byzantine *Hodegetria* where the Virgin wears three brooches, one on the mantle that covers the forehead and one on each shoulder. Later, in paintings and sculpture, the brooch on the left shoulder was obscured by the head of the Christ child and the one on the forehead replaced by a crown. The one on the right shoulder wandered into a position over the chest of Mary. Janson also points to a miniature from 'Les Grandes Heures de Jean, Duc de Berry', where St Peter allows the Duke into heaven when he shows him his impressive gem buckle. Janson's main focus in her article is the oriental sapphire, but she refers to the *Lapidaria*, in which Hrabanus Maurus was the first author to describe "a coherent set of Christian values assigned to stones", the evidence of which he had found in the Bible. Janson 1973, pp. 38–42.

verbal and visual sensation to investigate how in the 15th century some Vadstena brethren guided the pilgrims towards heaven.

By investigating a sermon on the Creed for the feast of St Peter in chains, *Festum Sancti Petri Ad Vincula*, and to some extent comparing it with two other examples from the same day, I will discuss how cultural memory—formed by all expressions of faith, but especially by art and text—made it possible to preach in a way that encouraged the listeners to contemplate that which cannot be seen and to consider it in an anagogical way.<sup>2</sup>

### A CRY FOR INDULGENCE

In the Revelations, Book IV, Christ told St Birgitta that pilgrims to Vadstena could receive the same plenary indulgence as the one granted to the San Pietro in Vincoli church in Rome. This privilege, however, became highly disputed, but in Vadstena, pilgrims nevertheless gathered on 1 August for the feast of St Peter in chains, where the deliverance from the fetters of sin was pivotal. Next to what is now the main entrance to the Vadstena church, the Gate of Forgiveness, where the pilgrims entered, there is still the Latin inscription tablet that informs us:<sup>3</sup>

The Son of God speaks to the bride: “[...] I dictated it [i.e., the Birgittine Rule] and endowed it with a spiritual endowment by granting it the indulgences attracted to the Roman church of Saint Peter in Chains. [...] You, my bride [...], if you cannot get the letter and favour of the pope and his seal upon the concession of the indulgences without payment in advance, my blessing is enough for you.”<sup>4</sup>

I have earlier investigated 19 sermons out of a total of 95 still extant from Vadstena Abbey for this feast.<sup>5</sup> The conclusion drawn is that there is an overall anagogic focus in them. The reason why the brethren so eagerly wanted people to listen to them was

2 Anagoge (or anagogy) is the fourth method in medieval biblical exegesis, where allusions to heaven and the afterlife are sought. The interpretative direction is upwards and, according to Hugh of St Victor, the invisible can be found in the visible: “Anagoge, id est sursum ductio, cum per visibile invisibile factum declaratur.” Hugh of St Victor 1854, PL 175, col. 9–28.

3 Anderson 1991, p. 44.

4 “Filius Dei loquitur ad sponsam: ‘[...] Ego dictavi eam [i.e., regulam sancti Saluatoris] et dotaui spirituali dote, scilicet concedendo indulgencias, que sunt in ecclesia sancti Petri ad vincula in Roma. [...] Tu autem sponsa mea, [...], si non poteris habere litteram et gratiam pape et sigillum super concessione indulgencie dicte nisi precedente pecunia, sufficit tibi benedictio mea.” *Rev.* IV.137:1, 5, 7; transl. in Morris & Searby 2008, p. 247.

5 Hallqvist 2019, passim.

their concern for the salvific path of the layman. I used the concept of the *via perfectionis* (road of perfection), the monastic principle for progression towards heaven, to describe the brethren's educational programme, an essentially monastic programme, adapted for lay people. The purpose of the programme was to transmit knowledge of how to progress through life and reach heaven as soon as possible after death.<sup>6</sup> Through the brethren's sermons, listeners were stimulated to develop a capacity for inner seeing, which promoted spiritual effort and *compunctio*.<sup>7</sup> A good opportunity to promote this seems to have been during the feast of St Peter in chains on 1 August, when the deliverance from the captivity of sin was pivotal and many pilgrims gathered in Vadstena.

#### FESTUM SANCTI PETRI AD VINCULA

The feast of St Peter in chains was a feast of medieval origin, rather than one of the early Church. Nor was it widely celebrated. It seems to have been solemnly observed by the Birgittine houses and their surrounding dioceses and elsewhere to have been celebrated as a minor feast. The Western date of celebration, 1 August, was chosen because it was the feast of consecration of the church San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome. There the chains, said to have been those with which St Peter was imprisoned in both Jerusalem and Rome, are still preserved. In Acts 12:1–11, the story is told about St Peter's imprisonment in Jerusalem by King Herod: when Peter was asleep, chained between two guards, an angel came and set him free. Thus, the feast commemorated the liberation from the shackles of sin, due to the power of binding and loosing, given to St Peter by Christ himself.<sup>8</sup> Therefore the chains in Rome were used for acts of penance.<sup>9</sup>

The *Breviarium Lincopense* tells us that the feast was celebrated for two reasons: it commemorated the liberations from prison of both St Peter and of Pope Alexander

6 The concept of *via perfectionis* I have borrowed from St Thomas Aquinas, who in *De perfectione spiritualis vitae* describes one road for each of the evangelical counsels, poverty, chastity, and obedience. It dealt with the monastic life, but I have used it to describe the instructions of the Vadstena brethren to lay people concerning their personal spiritual growth towards salvation, adapted to allow non-monastic people to put it into practice. See Thomas Aquinas *Opera omnia: De perf.*, chs. 7–10.

7 The Latin word *compunctio* contains much more than its modern English translation "compunction". It represents the memory and grief of the lost paradise and a sense of not being able to fully reach God, other than for short moments. It suggests both regret, sorrow, longing, and desire, a strong driving force on the *via perfectionis*.

8 Matt. 16:19.

9 The origins of the feast are described by von Falkenhausen 1990.

(c. 106–115), who when imprisoned told the daughter of the tribune Quirinus to kiss the chains of St Peter as a healing cure for her throat disease.<sup>10</sup>

In Vadstena, 1 August was the day that attracted the most pilgrims over the whole year. In order just to serve the pilgrims from the archdiocese of Uppsala, six to eight priests were needed in addition to the Vadstena brethren, who could hear confession and give absolution.<sup>11</sup> Confession was a prerequisite for receiving the plenary indulgence.<sup>12</sup> The sermons rarely mention the privilege of indulgence, but heavily stress contrition and confession, the pilgrim's state of mind and heart being of utter importance.

The privilege itself was challenged and debated, which could be a reason why the preachers did not talk about it,<sup>13</sup> but since Christ himself had given the privilege of indulgence to St Birgitta's monastery, the controversy over Vadstena's Ad Vincula privilege did not matter to the pilgrims. They came anyway, their very presence showing their willingness to strive for personal development.<sup>14</sup> My interest here is in how the preachers can be seen to have stimulated the inner vision of the laity to help them proceed in their spiritual journey.

#### ON THE PURPOSE OF MEDIEVAL ECCLESIASTICAL ART

Medieval art is multi-functional,<sup>15</sup> but primarily it does not aim at beauty. Nor is its purpose to delight the senses. It is not even about mimesis (in Latin: *imitatio*) but of representation.<sup>16</sup> In stark contrast to Renaissance art, medieval images do not attempt similitude. It is not likeness that makes medieval portraits identifiable, but attributes.<sup>17</sup> Pure beauty and bliss were not to be found anywhere on Earth. In earthly life, the only way to gain proximity to true beauty was to use one's inner gaze.

10 Peters 1955, pp. 736–737.

11 Fritz 2000, p. 111.

12 Swanson 2011, p. 114.

13 Höjer 1905, pp. 97–99, 145–150, 173–181, 210–223, describes the disputes exhaustively.

14 A recently discovered text in Old Swedish might show that the brethren helped secular priests to encourage their parishioners to go to Vadstena for indulgences. Hallqvist 2019, pp. 84–87, 91–93.

15 Theological, educational, aesthetical, and more.

16 *Mimesis/imitatio* is here used as depicting what something is (the particular) and *repraesentatio* as depicting what something could be (the universal). For an analysis of the meaning of these words, see Malm 1993, pp. 64–80.

17 Bynum 2011, pp. 58–61. “In this sense, a painted or sculpted image of a saint represents the saint in a manner parallel more to a relic, than to a portrait.” Bynum 2011, p. 59.

Inspired by Claire Barbetti and her theory of medieval ekphrasis,<sup>18</sup> the rhetorical term meaning a description in words of a work of art, I suggest that all expressions of faith in the Later Middle Ages co-operate and work in response to one another. I thereby suggest, along with Barbetti, that *paragone*, understood as the contest between text and image and represented during history by several iconoclastic battles, did not exist in medieval Western Christianity.

It is often said about music that it communicates something that is unreachable by words alone. The same goes for medieval art, I would argue. A single representation, such as the liturgical cradle, can comment on the whole plan of salvation (*Fig. 2*). The cradle with a baby's toy bells can be said to represent at the same time a church with windows and carvings. The vulnerable little Christ child, sleeping in the bed, is surrounded by the four living creatures, as recorded as standing around the throne of the Divine Majesty in Ezechiel and the Book of Revelation. With the cradle placed on the altar, where the sacrifice of the mass takes place, Christ appears simultaneously as the new-born baby and the Redeemer of the world. In the analysis of Caroline Walker Bynum, the two-in-one object, a cradle and a church, requires attention to the simultaneity of the aspects of Christ, human and divine, and of his life stages. It is not a matter of transformation from the one to the other, but of a simultaneity pointing beyond itself.<sup>19</sup>

Medieval religious art seems to me consciously to be pointing beyond itself, which puts it in the same position as that of text: that of the incapability to enunciate all its references. If this is the case, how can art and text work together to promote the inner gaze that leads to contemplation and to some sense of knowing something about God? How do they sing their antiphony?

#### ART AND THEOLOGY

According to medieval theologians such as Augustine and Adam Scotus, art tries to reverse the lost vision that resulted from the Fall, when our first parents were expelled from paradise and lost direct sight of God. During history, Man has occasionally been reminded of that direct vision of the Divine through epiphanies, and it was re-established over a little longer period by the Word incarnate, i.e., Christ's life on Earth. However, the promise of the full vision of the Divine is reserved for the blessed who at the end of time will see him face to face.<sup>20</sup>

18 Barbetti 2011, *passim*.

19 Bynum 2011, pp. 62–65.

20 Kessler 2006, pp. 414–415.



*Fig. 2. The crib of the infant Jesus, liturgical cradle, 15th century, Brabant, southern Netherlands. 35.4 x 28.9 x 18.4 cm, woodwork, polychromy, mixed media (parchment, silk, seed pearls, gold thread, enamels). Photograph: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC (API Access).*



Like Jeffrey Hamburger, Herbert Kessler, and Caroline Walker Bynum,<sup>21</sup> I argue that late medieval religious art is deeply connected to theology. Without it, art cannot convey its full meaning. Religious art of the time is dependent on understanding the period's theology, but it can also be argued that it is the other way around. How could, for example, the Throne of Mercy, so common on church walls, possibly be understood without knowledge of the Creed? However, at the same time, how could anyone possibly grasp an understanding of the Trinity without pictorial representations such as the Throne of Mercy?

Though not undisputed, some art historians, for example, Søren Kaspersen, have seen a connection between a handful of painters or painter's workshops and Vadstena Abbey. These painters very often present scenes from Genesis with the Fall and its consequences, divine mercy being depicted when God gives Adam and Eve some clothes and tools to provide them for their hard life on Earth.<sup>22</sup> Credo suites are also very common in the iconographic programmes of painters with assumed connections to Vadstena.

The Credo representations are of special interest here, since I shall be dealing with a sermon that ties its teaching to them. The tradition developed in the 4th century that on the day of Pentecost the Apostles had stated one article each of the *Symbolum Apostolicum*. Painting the Apostles with *tituli* expressing the articles seems to have originated in Reichenau, Germany, in the 10th century. During the 13th century, the tradition was further developed in France by adding twelve of the Old Testament Prophets with their own *tituli*, as typologies prefiguring the Apostles. In Sweden, the original type, with Apostles only, is known from several 14th- and a few 15th-century examples. In the 15th century, the typological representations gained dominance. According to Bengt Ingmar Kilström, the majority and the best of the Swedish Credo suites seem to be connected to the theologians at Vadstena in one way or another (*Fig. 3*).<sup>23</sup>

The Credo suites have widely been regarded as a catechism in images, used didactically by the priests to educate the laity. Due to their various placements, which sometimes make them difficult to see, Anna Nilsén suggests that they were not primarily didactic. Instead, she argues that the Creed presents the foundation of the faith and that would have been reason enough to paint it.<sup>24</sup> I suggest a combination of these viewpoints. Even if distant *tituli* were unreadable, the paintings of the Apostles were a strong aid for memory. The purpose of the Creed is none other than expressing the

21 Apparent in much of their writings, but here I refer to their respective articles in *The Mind's Eye* (Hamburger & Bouché 2006).

22 Kaspersen 2013, p. 215.

23 Kilström 1952, pp. 130–136, 139, 143.

24 Nilsén 1986, p. 259.



Fig. 3. Saint Andrew Apostle, text on scroll: "Et in Ihesum Christum filium eius un(ic)um nostrum D(ominum)", detail of Credo suite, murals by the Risinge Master, early 15th century, Örbjerga church, Östergötland, Sweden. Photograph: Emelie Malmberg, © Diocese of Linköping.

foundation of the holy faith, both on church walls and in people's minds. The laity had to memorize the Creed, as during confession the priest might ask his confidant to repeat its words. After all, the Creed together with the *Pater noster* and *Ave Maria*, were the foundations of the faith that everyone should know. Apart from confession, sermons were the place for educating the people about these *elementa* of the holy faith.<sup>25</sup> This leads us to the Ad Vincula sermon chosen for consideration here.

25 Kilström 1958, pp. 163–192.

## ACHO IOHANNIS AND HIS SERMON ON ST PETER IN CHAINS

Acho Iohannis was a highly regarded preacher and negotiator in the affairs of the Birgittine Order. Little is known about his early years, other than he was a priest in Västerås. After a position in the abbey became open, he entered in 1416. In 1442 he was elected Bishop of Västerås. The sisters sent a letter to the archbishop, asking for permission to keep Acho at Vadstena, but it was denied. A beautiful mitre, belonging to Västerås Cathedral, was made by the Vadstena sisters and was probably a gift for Acho's consecration in 1442.<sup>26</sup> On one of the bands is embroidered: "Over the whole wide world, a holier man has not been born".<sup>27</sup> The band is damaged and some text cut off, but the quote is from a vesper hymn for St John the Baptist.<sup>28</sup> Of course, it does not refer to Acho Iohannis personally, but perhaps he was devoted to this saint, who had an altar in the abbey church,<sup>29</sup> and felt associated to him through the name that his father had in common with the saint.<sup>30</sup> Acho often visited the abbey and in 1453 he returned there to die.<sup>31</sup>

When he was ordained a bishop, he brought two codices with him from the abbey library, one of which is the manuscript now preserved in Uppsala University Library as MS C 326. It contains seven sermons for the Ad Vincula feast, but only one can be considered here, namely the one in fols. 150v–153v, since it is the one commenting on the Creed and the gems. It seems likely that this sermon was produced during Acho's time in the monastery, between 1416 and 1442, since the feast seems to have been minor in other dioceses and in Västerås only *simplex*. The sermons in the codex, or parts of them, however, were probably reused in Västerås in one way or another.

In his *prothema*, the initial part of the sermon, Acho states that the words of the *thema*, the biblical statement that is to be elaborated on, *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc pe-*

26 Ekström 1939, pp. 152–161.

27 "Non fuit uasti spatium per orbis sanctior quisq[uam] geni[tus]." Ekström has "wiser" instead of "holier" due to a misreading of the Latin text ("caucior" instead of "sanctor"). Ekström 1939, p. 161.

28 "Non fuit vasti spatium per orbis/sanctor quisquam genitus Joanne/qui nefas saeculi meruit lavantem/tingere lymphis." Non fuit vasti spatium per | Cantus Manuscript Database (cantus-database.org)

29 The altar dedicated to St John the Baptist was placed in the middle of the northern wall, within the iron enclosure. Searby 2015, p. 250.

30 I am grateful to Prof. Stephan Borgehammar for having pointed this out to me.

31 Ekström 1939, p. 162.

*tram edificabo ecclesiam meam*,<sup>32</sup> are chosen because the holy faith is the foundation for everyone believing in Christ, and the faith is the rock on which every Christian builds his house.<sup>33</sup> He elaborates on this statement through two *exempla*, illustrative stories used to underline and confirm the message.

Then, starting on the *sermo*, the main part of the sermon, in accordance with the art of preaching, he repeats the *thema*, but after that immediately presents another biblical passage, “Fundamenta muri ciuitatis omni lapide precioso ornata,”<sup>34</sup> which is the one he elaborates. Having started by stating that the holy faith is grounded in the doctrine and examples of the Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles, one would expect that Acho would go on by commenting on the Old Testament typologies—but he does not. Instead, he turns to the New Testament, relating the events on Pentecost in Acts 2 to the Apocalypse. Without mentioning Apoc. 21:14 about the Apostles having their names written on the twelve foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem, he connects the Apostles to a gemstone each.

Even though the Ad Vincula feast was a feast of one Apostle, the gems are the main concern for Acho. They are described first, with both their worldly and spiritual significances, then each is connected to an article of the Creed, and finally, which Apostle put which gemstone in the foundation of the Heavenly City and why is described. Apparently, Acho has Apoc. 21:14 in mind here. Although he mentions several worldly benefits from these gemstones, Acho’s focus is on the spiritual ones.

Outlined below is a summary of Acho’s presentation that notes the gemstone, article of the Creed, and corresponding Apostle:<sup>35</sup>

1. *Jasper*: always verdant,<sup>36</sup> never withering, expels phantasms, makes safe and cures diseases, especially dropsy.

*Article 1*: “I believe in the one and only God, Father almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth”, because we believe that the power of the Almighty never withers.

*Peter*: his faith was verdant before the others. He condemns with this article all heresies.

32 “Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). The sermon, like nearly all medieval Vadstena sermons, was written in Latin, but delivered in Swedish so that the laity could understand.

33 UUB MS C 326, fol. 150 vb.

34 “The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones” (Apoc. 21:19).

35 UUB MS C 326, fols. 151va–153vb. The original language is Latin.

36 Jasper was considered a green, transparent stone.

2. *Sapphire*: like a clear and blue sky, strengthens the heart and inner powers and sends forth its splendour when hit by sunbeams.

*Article 2*: “and in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son, our Lord”, because we believe that he is our Lord when he helps us and therefore, we put our hope in him.

*Andrew*: like the sapphire he reflected the sunbeams, i.e., the words of the Lord, and followed him when he was called.

3. *Chalcedony*: pale colour, cannot be carved, when heated it attracts dross. It expels demons and preserves strength.

*Article 3*: “who was conceived from the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary”, because out of love God sent us his Son to attract the dross of our mortality.

*James, brother of the Lord*: he was pale, due to ascetism, and he resisted carving, i.e., persecutions and trials. He attracted dross, i.e., simple people, for whom he was always praying.

4. *Emerald*: the most verdant gem. It exceeds all green plants and soothes the eyes.

*Article 4*: “who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried”, because he who contemplates the passion of Christ never tires of serving the Divine.

*John*: the greenery of his virginity was never satiated, and he wrote this article because he saw more of the Lord’s passion and wrote about things the other evangelists did not mention.

5. *Sardonyx*: black in the centre, white in the middle, and red on the outside.

*Article 5*: “descended into hell, rose again from the dead on the third day” because of the darkness in the depth, and the whiteness and the redness when he rose.

*Thomas*: he was black because he doubted, then white through confession, and finally red through his acrid passion.

6. *Carnelian*: it has the colour of blood, excites joy, expels fear, and makes the onyx, which increases feuds, harmless.

*Article 6*: “ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God”, because Christ, when ascending, was reddish and his clothes red like those of the ones who tread grapes. Then there is joy and no fear, because at the right side of the Father there is only peace and concordance.

*James, brother of John*: he so much wished to participate in the sitting on the right hand, which is shown by his mother’s words.<sup>37</sup>

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37 Matt. 20:20–28.

7. *Chrysolite*: it glows like gold, sends out sparks, and expels the devil when carried on the left shoulder.

*Article 7*: “from there, he will come to judge the living and the dead”, because he then will shine like gold, due to the wisdom with which he will judge the evil and the good. He will send out sparks from his mouth and he will expel the demons by means of the cross, which he carried on his shoulder.

*Philip*: his name means “mouth of fire”, signifying him who as a judge will send out flames from his mouth.

8. *Beryl*: pale colour, when polished on six sides it makes people mild and invincible.

*Article 8*: “I believe in the Holy Spirit”, because he is the Spirit of mercy and pity, who effused six works of mercy.<sup>38</sup> He makes people mild and merciful by providing comfort in all our troubles.

*Bartholomew*: his name means “he who prevents the waters”, and it is fitting because the Holy Spirit swallows all the waters of trouble. This Apostle became so invincible that he was excoriated while still alive, and therefore this article is suitable to him.

9. *Topaz*: surpasses all gems with its preciousness and signifies faithful contemplation.

*Article 9*: “the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints”, because it means that the struggling Church already adheres to God by means of contemplation and can claim being the triumphant Church as soon as it is joined to God through clear vision.

*Matthew*: he was a sinner who was called to be a disciple, signifying that the struggling Church shall be the triumphant Church in heaven. He made such progress in contemplation that he, having been a sinner, became an evangelist, whose Gospel is read throughout the Church.

10. *Chrysoprase*: light conceals the colour and darkness reveals it.

*Article 10*: “the forgiveness of sins”.

*Simon the Zealot*: his name means “he who is obedient”, because from obedience follows the remission of sins.

11. *Jacinth*: its colour changes with the weather. It gives swiftness to the limbs and brings a mild and salubrious manner.

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38 Matt. 25:35.



*Article 11:* “the resurrection of the body”, because this made the biggest change, i.e., from perishable flesh came imperishable, and from mortality came immortality.

*Thaddeus:* his name means “little heart”, i.e., he had a loving heart for all the barbarians’ hearts and changed the fierce Mesopotamians so that they could participate in the resurrection in glory.

12. *Amethyst:* purple, i.e., blended from the colours of the rose and the violet. The amethyst makes us perceive the love of heaven, because of the mixture of the love of the rose and the humility of the violet. Love for the heavenly homeland brings out the flames of desire to be with Christ.

*Article 12:* “the everlasting life. Amen.”

*Matthias:* his name means “given”, i.e., instead of Jude, who committed himself to everlasting death. Matthias is rightly given, because eternal bliss cannot be bought, for the sufferings of this life can never compare to the future glory. No one could buy it because it is freely given by Christ.

The sermon ends abruptly with only a trinitarian formula. Acho has presented the Creed and at the same time given information about the qualities of the gems. He shows how each Apostle connects both to his own article, the one he pronounced on the day of Pentecost, and to his own gemstone by likeness in qualities.

#### PROMOTING THE SEEING BEYOND

The sermon has a very simple arrangement. Acho has ordered the Apostles traditionally and the gemstones from the Apocalypse are in the correct biblical order.<sup>39</sup> It is likely that he had acquired his information about the qualities of the gems from the *Liber lapidum* by Marbodius Redonensis (c. 1035–1123), the Bishop of Rennes. This was a popular book in the possession of the Vadstena library, likely already by 1410. It is included in the codex UUL C 28.<sup>40</sup> Acho’s descriptions of the stones resemble Marbodius’s text, but Acho has put into the sermon his own thoughts too, to make the stones, articles, and Apostles fit together and to pronounce the same message.

It should be pointed out, as does Bynum, that gems and metals were considered resistant to putrefaction and all forms of decay, but at the same time were composed of organic matter that was even half-alive, because they were thought to grow organically deep below the surface of the earth. This gave gems and metals mostly attractive

39 Måle 1925, p. 238, n. 2.

40 Fredriksson 1997, p. 49.

qualities, but at the same time also caused some repulsion, since people's greatest fear was the corruption that prevented eternity, i.e., caused the eternal death of the soul. Nevertheless, gems, gold, and silver, together with the bones of holy people, were the closest possible available material connections to and reminders of eternity.<sup>41</sup>

Bynum importantly points out that the laity by the Later Middle Ages had absorbed more than a basic religious knowledge. This had been achieved through many different channels, for example, preaching, pilgrimage propaganda, liturgy, and edifying literature. She also stresses that education and status were not always correlated, so that the dichotomies priest/layman or elite/popular are inapplicable. Many women also had more religious knowledge than their husbands.<sup>42</sup> As Patricia Ranft has shown, some women religious gave spiritual advice to both women and men, and even to clergy.<sup>43</sup> It therefore seems clear to me that the laity who went on pilgrimages to Vadstena in the 15th century were fully capable of receiving the knowledgeable preaching given by the Vadstena brethren.

In what way, then, does Acho Iohannis forward the vision of the unseeable in this sermon? First, it is about simplicity. The sermon was held either in the abbey church or outside. In this case, we do not know which, but it is known that the brethren used to preach outdoors at large gatherings.<sup>44</sup> Either way, there were no images to look at, but since *Credo* suites seem to have been common on church walls, it is likely that Acho assumed that the pilgrims had seen such images before and could recall them. Even if some had not seen a *Credo* suite, the figuration was easy to follow.

Second, Acho does not take the expected route after having mentioned Patriarchs and Prophets. It would have been reasonable to talk about how the typologies from the Old Testament were confirmed and advanced in the New Testament, but he chooses another path. Instead of turning the pilgrims' attention backwards in time, he turns it forwards and makes it anagogic. The time span is no longer between Prophets and Apostles, but between Apostles and the final vision in heaven, symbolized by the gems, that is, between Acts and Apocalypse. In this way he turns the gaze of the pilgrims towards heaven instead of keeping it on Earth.

Third, Acho does not describe the Heavenly City per se, only the twelve foundational gems of faith. In this way, the pilgrim is left to wonder primarily not about what heaven looks like, but about who the Creator might be who built such a city. The pilgrims are helped to contemplate what life in that place would be like and how to work

41 Bynum 2011, p. 182.

42 Bynum 2011, p. 129.

43 Ranft 2000, *passim*, esp. pp. 101–102.

44 Andersson & Borgehammar 1997, p. 227.

one's way forwards, helped by moral examples from gems and Apostles, for example, by following Peter in having an ever-verdant faith, signified by the jasper, and Matthew in making progress in faithful contemplation, shown by the topaz.

Nevertheless, one could object that medieval laity in general were hardly likely to have seen much jewellery and would not have known to what Acho was referring when he spoke of gems. Even if that were the case, I would maintain that it was of minor importance. Mereth Lindgren points out that many Swedish churches had stained glass windows in the 13th century, but due to its fragile nature very little has been preserved.<sup>45</sup> I suggest that stained glass, with all its colours, could be seen as representing jewels. Suger, the Abbot of Saint-Denis, elaborated on jewellery, stained glass, and the rays of Divine Light when he rearranged the chancel of his abbey church in the 12th century, a contribution to art and architecture that hardly can be overestimated. About gems, he writes:

[...] Thus, when—out of my delight in the beauty of the house of God—the loveliness of the many-colored gems has called me away from external cares, and worthy meditation has induced me to reflect, transferring that which is material to that which is immaterial, on the diversity of the sacred virtues: then it seems to me that I see myself dwelling, as it were, in some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven; and that, by the grace of God, I can be transported from this inferior to that higher world in an anagogical manner.<sup>46</sup>

Such “anagogical manner” of seeing is the point here. Much as Suger looked at the new architecture and art of his church and felt translocated to a different sphere, so did the pilgrims listening to Acho's preaching. Late medieval spirituality, expressed in sermons, art, liturgy, and music was, I dare say, heavily influenced by anagogical thinking, for example, from Pseudo-Dionysios. Seeing beyond was about leaving earthly matters and finding oneself situated in another domain, where important insights on how to progress towards eternity could be grasped. The gems represented and even transferred virtues to the pilgrims partaking in this inner journey if the pilgrim himself worked his way forth in the same direction as mediated by the gemstones.

45 Lindgren 1996, p. 414.

46 “[...] Unde, cum ex dilectione decoris domus Dei aliquando multicolor, gemmarum speciositas ab extrinsecis [i.e., extrinsecis] me curis devocaret, sanctarum etiam diversitatem virtutum, de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo, honesta meditatio insistere persuaderet, videror videre me quasi sub aliqua extranea orbis terrarium plaga, quae nec tota sit in terrarium faece, nec tota in coeli puritate, demorari, ab hac etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more Deo donante posse transferri.” Panofsky 1979, pp. 62–65.

In the Revelations of St Birgitta, *Rev.* IV.124, St Agnes puts the crown of patience in suffering on the head of St Birgitta. Seven gems are already in the crown: jasper, sapphire, emerald, pearl, topaz, diamond, and carbuncle. Helped by the virtues of these gems, presented in another but similar way to that of the sermon by Acho, the bride of Christ will endure her trials, at the same time knowing that there are some more to be expected, i.e., the crown is to be expanded by more gems that will make her even better and holier.<sup>47</sup> The trials, for which the gems give corresponding virtues for mastering, make the pilgrim progress towards heaven. Again, gems are thought of as helpful in an anagogic way.

#### THE USE OF EKPHRASIS, *ENARGEIA*, AND PATHOS

Claire Barbetti categorizes as ekphrasis not only texts about objects of art but also texts about mystical visions and dream visions. The visions themselves are not ekphrases. Rather, the ekphrases are the verbal descriptions of them. Ekphrasis then is “a verbal representation of a visual representation”. It works together with memory to interpret and translate the vision into language.<sup>48</sup>

The homogenous culture of medieval Sweden, and here especially of the Vadstena spirituality, held a cultural memory that allowed mental images to develop without getting outside the doctrinal boundaries. Following Barbetti, I suggest that this memory bank was created by texts, spoken words, and art, and thus helped the mind make new inner images out of what was seen or heard. The ekphrastic text made a vision possible to experience through translation for all who, unlike the visionary him-/herself, did not experience it directly. In ancient rhetoric, *enargeia* denoted a quality of visual vividness. In speech, it created a vivid image in the mind. The success of *enargeia* was related to its participation in the culture’s common bank of memories. When successful, *enargeia* also created pathos, the engagement of feelings within the listener or reader.<sup>49</sup> To understand how seeing with the mind’s eye was an emotional form of intelligence, I will provide two examples of how the Vadstena preachers engaged in forms of *enargeia*.

47 Morris & Searby 2008, pp. 210–211.

48 Barbetti 2011, p. 88.

49 Barbetti 2011, *passim*, but esp. pp. 40, 52, 97, 112, 119.

## A DESCRIPTION OF HELL

The ability to see with one's inner eye, to use one's imagination, so apparently prominent during the Later Middle Ages, was, not unexpectedly, also used for deterrence, as in a sermon by an anonymous preacher, often engaged to preach on larger occasions. Based on his handwriting, Roger Andersson and Håkan Hallberg have suggested him to be Petrus Olavi, partly contemporary with Acho in Vadstena.<sup>50</sup>

In this sermon, Petrus gives a vivid description of the conditions in hell.<sup>51</sup> He reports that the sinners who in life had bound themselves to the passion of sin, shall be shackled for punishment. (Remember the feast's focus on shackles and chains.) The sinners burn because of lust, are hungry and thirsty due to gluttony, dishonoured for seeking worldly glory, and are hurt by the teeth and claws of demons for having neglected their neighbours. The punishments are severe and many, for there is a fitting punishment for every sin. In hell, there is cold, fire, worms, stench, sulphur, darkness, shame, despair, and frightening demons. The punishments do not kill, but they are never-ending and impossible to get accustomed to. There is pain and horror, and although there is always a burning fire, it is cold and dark. The damned are branded and torn apart by demons, like corpses by ravens. Because the sinners have turned themselves away from God, they are denied the blessing of seeing him.

Petrus refers to a couple of revelations from St Birgitta, i.e., to the ekphrastic translations of them into language, made by St Birgitta herself.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps he, who hardly ever finished his sermons in writing, intended to quote them when performing his sermon, but in his text, they are used as sources for his own imaginary vision. Thereby Petrus creates a new ekphrastic representation, which clearly achieves its purpose to deter the listeners. The induced flight away from the frightening scenes co-operates with the attraction towards the scenes of bliss and glory, to which we now turn.

## A DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN

From a sermon composed by Nicolaus Ragvaldi around 1500, we have a vivid ekphrastic description of a vision of heaven.<sup>53</sup> It is told to show the benefits of praying the rosary when its male visionary sees the rosary being shown to God: the most holy Virgin Mary with all her maidens, every angel, and all the saints who have come to heaven

<sup>50</sup> Andersson 2001, p. 48, n. 11.

<sup>51</sup> UUB MS C 317, fol. 207v.

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of Birgitta's authorship and the editing of her texts, see Searby 2022, pp.

21–40.

<sup>53</sup> UUB MS C 302, fols. 82r–93v.

since Adam give glory and thanks to God because of the meditations in the rosary prayers, both in heaven and on Earth. All angels and saints pray for all the religious and pious people who occupy themselves daily with the rosary and they sing the most joyous Hallelujah after every meditation, bowing to the Virgin and genuflecting before Christ. Everyone thus occupied is given a fragrant, shining, and everlasting crown.

From Nicolaus' description it is easy to imagine heaven. At the same time, he promotes inner vision *per se* by promoting the new form of meditative prayer, the rosary, and its imaginative contemplation of biblical scenes.<sup>54</sup>

### THE EFFECT OF CULTURAL MEMORY

As Barbetti points out, a vision's verbal translation is not just mimesis. It does not just copy the vision but understands and interprets it. It uses the tools of *memoria* to order the ingredients of the vision to construct a meaning for which there was a cultural consensus.<sup>55</sup> This is the explanation of why the ekphrastic descriptions of the visions of heaven and hell could easily be conveyed by Petrus and Nicolaus, but verbal translation works in a different way when Acho transfers his audience to the unseen realms of God, because he does not perform any ekphrasis.

While Acho encourages the pilgrim to see in a contemplative way and with his faith understand something about God and his plan, Petrus and Nicolaus do not move beyond visual imagery in their descriptions. These are ekphrastic descriptions, with *enargeia* promoting imagination, but not necessarily contemplation.

As far as I know, there are no paintings depicting the Apostles with the foundational gems. Acho might have read other sermons constructed around this idea, or it might be an idea of his own. He replaces the Old Testament Prophets and their typological *tituli* with the gems of the Heavenly City. In doing this he tells the story of how the Kingdom is yet to come and, in a way, makes the Apostles with their *tituli* a new form of typology, pointing towards the end of time. To participate, the pilgrim had to learn from the priest both catechism and moral improvement. Seeing beyond acted both as a deterrent and an encouragement. Through Acho's preaching, the pilgrim was stimulated emotionally and encouraged to contemplate that which cannot be seen.

54 For the promotion of the rosary, a guild was constituted by Clemens Martini at Vadstena in 1504. Carlsson 1947, pp. 6–7.

55 Barbetti 2011, p. 98.



## CONCLUSION

To conclude this investigation of how the mind's eye was encouraged by the Vadstena preachers to see what was not physically there and to grow the sense of *compunctio* in the heart and reach out for heaven, let us return to the Motala buckle.

This extraordinary piece of jewellery tells the same story as both Abbot Suger in his architectural innovations and Acho in his sermon on the Creed. Sermon and buckle both draw the attention of the mind's eye to the longed-for bliss and to the moral prerequisites of reaching it. Because of the consensus of cultural memory, Acho was able to tell the same story as Abbot Suger and the rosettes in Saint-Denis, and as the Parisian goldsmith who saw the rosettes in the many churches that soon took after Saint-Denis (or even in actual Saint-Denis) and made the Motala buckle. Because of the consensus of cultural memory, people who heard and saw would know what that story was all about, marvel, and thus participate in it in a contemplative way.

The owner of the buckle could wear it next to his/her heart as a shield of faith, a physical reminder of the foundations of faith and what that means anagogically. The pilgrims could keep their insights within their hearts. Pronounced in an environment where different kinds of expressions co-operated to enhance the message, the effect of the sermon was a furthering of a pronounced late medieval materiality into a non-material faith, using the mind's eye to make itself known to people, giving them the insights about how to die, while retaining life.

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KARIN LAGERGREN

# Birgittine Liturgical Music—Teamwork or the Product of a Single Genius Mind?

## *A New Hypothesis for an Old Question*

The question concerning who created the Birgittine sisters' Divine Office liturgy, the *Cantus sororum*, is a topic that has attracted much attention among Birgittine scholars. This Office is a repertoire structured as a weekly cycle, consisting of some 200 Gregorian chants and created for exclusive use in the Birgittine Order. It is the only liturgical repertoire that has ever been compiled to be performed exclusively by women. The presumed author, when it comes to the creation of the *Cantus sororum*, was Magister Petrus of Skänninge (d. 1378), who was Birgitta's confessor as well as her collaborator in drafting the organization of the Birgittine Order, though no sources of the *Cantus sororum* from Petrus' own time exist. The first preserved sources are from the middle of the 15th century and written in Vadstena Abbey. Earlier sources from other abbeys of the Birgittine Order are not preserved. Petrus' authorship has been debated, contested, and accepted by scholars to various degrees. The question of the *Cantus sororum*'s origin has been burdened with ideological claims concerned with authenticity, seeking to place the sources as close to Birgitta as possible, and a lack of careful source reading. One early example is Carl-Allan Moberg, influential professor of musicology at Uppsala University, who in a text from 1932 named Magister Petrus as the author of the *Cantus sororum*. According to Moberg, Magister Petrus, following the normal medieval procedure, compiled the music for the Office mainly from other plainchants.<sup>1</sup> Though acknowledging compilation rather than newly composed chants as central to the *Cantus sororum*, Moberg considered Magister Petrus in every

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1 Moberg 1932, p. 401. However, Moberg emphasizes that all hymns and melodies are borrowed, which until this day remains an uncontested fact. The hymn repertoire is treated by Ann-Marie Nilsson in her Ph.D. thesis, see Nilsson 1991, pp. 92–120.

aspect to be the mastermind behind the repertoire. This perspective is typical for much of the research that considers the *Cantus sororum*. In short it is described as a work compiled of both unique compositions from within the Birgittine Order and borrowings from the common stock of Gregorian chant, and that the compilation of this repertoire is attributed to Magister Petrus. The problem with this assumption is that there are no preserved sources from his time, a fact that is seldom taken into consideration. That this general presumption of individual authorship is still widespread is, for example, indicated by musicologist Hilikka-Liisa Vuori's claim that all chants not known outside the Birgittines (or are obvious reworkings of previously known melodies) are to be considered the work of Magister Petrus.<sup>2</sup>

Other scholars have had a more nuanced view of Magister Petrus' authorship in relation to other possible contributors. Birgit Klockars, Tryggve Lundén, and Viveca Servatius are, for example, scholars who have opened up the possibility that Magister Petrus had assistance, and that the work was not completed by the time of his death in 1378.<sup>3</sup> In particular, musicologist Viveca Servatius has discussed this question most thoroughly from a musicological viewpoint.<sup>4</sup> She addresses, among other questions, the problem with the verbs that refer to composing activities. *Dictare*, *componere*, and *compilare* are all verbs used in medieval sources to describe activities of composing music, but these words have little to do with the romantic concept of composing a piece of art out of a single person's unique inspiration, as the concept developed during the 19th century.<sup>5</sup> Rather, composing was to be seen as an act of intertextuality where the composer freely borrowed in order to achieve something new in a world where copyright was not an issue.

### THE PROBLEMS

One problem with the attribution of the *Cantus sororum* to Magister Petrus is that chants only found in the Birgittine Order—these are termed unique—have not been analysed from a music analytical viewpoint. Such an analysis could reveal if there exists a certain musical style that could be attributed to one single person, such as, for example, Magister Petrus. According to Vuori, chants without concordances outside the Birgittines are chants composed by Magister Petrus. However, it is impossible to make such assumptions, since no sources from Petrus' time are preserved. Since

2 Vuori 2017, p. 66.

3 Lundén 1976, p. XXXIX; Klockars 1976, pp. 99–114; Servatius 1990, p. 226.

4 Servatius 1990.

5 Musicologist Thomas Forrest Kelly has pointed out that “fecit” [“made”] is the most common word describing what we would call the act of composing music. See Kelly 2010, p. 112.



Petrus is not known for any musical works outside the Birgittines that could be used as comparison, this theory must be regarded as a dead end.

A second problem is that much scholarship—although not all, as seen above—takes for granted that a fully developed *Cantus sororum* existed at Magister Petrus' time. This view does not take into consideration that liturgical repertoires are developed over long time spans in tandem with their practitioners.<sup>6</sup> A third problem concerns the source situation. As already mentioned, there are no notated *Cantus sororum* manuscripts earlier than around the middle of the 15th century, and there are several threads to follow when examining the origin of the *Cantus sororum*. Against this background, the problems I seek to address can be summarized as follows:

1. According to medieval sources, and what can be called the Birgittine narrative, the *Cantus sororum* was composed by Magister Petrus.

2. The title of a corpus is not a table of contents. It is impossible to determine whether the *Cantus sororum* mentioned in the earliest sources is identical to what has come down to us in notated form. The following example may serve as an illustration. In 1407, two men travelled from Pirita to Vadstena, asking for a copy of the *Cantus sororum* for the new foundation.<sup>7</sup> These men asked for privileges, relics, and a copy of the Song of the sisters—a *Cantus sororum*.<sup>8</sup> The problem with such a request is that the analysis does not take into consideration the actual content of the liturgy. We do not know what kind of material they brought back to Pirita.

3. From a more sociological and ethnomusicological perspective, liturgies are made for practical use and are repertoires intended to help people in their daily prayer and devotion. This means that a liturgy cannot be a top-down product from a single person but needs to be reworked in conjunction with its users. No liturgy is complete from the beginning but is negotiated with its practitioners.<sup>9</sup> A person from the community in question can be the (appointed) driving force and editor and the person who puts his or her name under the repertoire, but it is very unlikely that this person could achieve a work on his/her own.<sup>10</sup> I will examine two groups of people of importance for this argument.

4. There is not one single source with musical notation earlier than c. 1450, which is about 70 years after the death of Magister Petrus. There are no written documents

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6 The procedure in medieval times is difficult to trace, but examples of how monastic liturgies emerged in modern times after the Second Vatican Council are discussed in Strinnholm Lagergren 2009.

7 The foundation is Vallis Mariae/Mariental in Pirita, Estonia.

8 *DV* 149.

9 See Strinnholm Lagergren 2009 for a discussion on contemporary conditions.

10 For a detailed discussion on composing activities in the Middle Ages, see Kelly 2010.

that give us information on what the liturgy and chant looked like at the consecration of Vadstena Abbey in 1384.

The four above-mentioned points form the structure of the present study. I will address the historiography of the *Cantus sororum* and discuss what can possibly be known about the origin of this Office. I will in particular treat the period from which there are no liturgical notated sources and present some alternative views. I will argue that the work was initiated by Magister Petrus and Birgitta, but it was carried out over a long period of time by other Birgittines and eventually settling as a fixed liturgy in the form as we know it as the *Cantus sororum* in 1430. I will lastly propose a chronology for the process of a completed *Cantus sororum* in the form as it is known from the earliest sources. But before addressing these points, a few words on the Birgittine liturgy are provided as contextual background.

#### BRIEF NOTES ON THE BIRGITTINE LITURGY

As mentioned in the introduction, the *Cantus sororum* is constructed as a weekly cycle in the form of a ferial Office with one office a day devoted to the Virgin Mary and her role in salvation history. The listing below summarizes the content of each day in the *Cantus sororum*:

*Sunday*: Creation, joy in the Triune God. Mary as the ideal model for creation.

*Monday*: Beauty and fall of the angels. Mary venerated by the angels.

*Tuesday*: Fall of Adam, the Patriarchs. Mary as premediated protector of the fallen.

*Wednesday*: Birth of Mary and childhood. The Conception.

*Thursday*: Incarnation of the Word. The Annunciation.

*Friday*: Suffering and death of Christ. Mary's suffering.

*Saturday*: The Virgin's faith in Christ. Mary's death and Assumption.<sup>11</sup>

*Fig. 1 (to the right). Incipits (beginnings) for chants in the Cantus sororum for Thursday. Among the incipits are Ave maris stella (end of second line) and Sponse iungendo (starting fifth line). Such a collection of incipits is called a directorium chori and is a type of book that is typical of the Birgittine abbey at Vadstena and has not been found in any other Birgittine abbey. Source: MS C 442 Directorium chori monasterium Vadstenensis, fol. 24r, 15th century, Uppsala University Library (CC BY 2.5 SE). <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:alvin:portal:record-116062>.*

11 After Urberg 2016, p. 28. Theologian Alf Härdelin has treated the theological content of the *Cantus sororum* in Härdelin 1998, pp. 249–273.

Elegit sibi dei filius  
matrem in terris

24

ex alui virginis cubiculo **B**eatiss  
populus Laudate n **A**ve marie  
stella **L**audate eternaliter **M**agis  
**Q**uoniam madaunt dominus **M**emento  
**R**esponse unigēdo filio **L**onificam  
te **A**ve dūc dūc **A**ve stella matut

Texts and chants all mirror these themes, making it a mariocentric liturgy. Taken together, the *Cantus sororum* is a mixture of chants and texts borrowed from the standard repertoire of plainchant, chants unique to the Birgittines without external concordances, and reworkings of borrowed material. This results in an Office with a varied repertoire containing chants in many different styles: syllabic, melismatic, narrow range, wide range, etc. This Office was always the same in all Birgittine abbeys and changed very little during the liturgical year, in contrast to the Birgittine brothers who observed the liturgy that was in use in the diocese in which the abbey was situated.<sup>12</sup> The brothers' role was to offer in-house assistance by celebrating Mass and hearing confessions, and they were also, in contrast to the sisters including the abbess, allowed to move outside the abbey. They offered an important spiritual function in that they completed the sisters' Marian devotion with a liturgy that to a greater extent observed the liturgical year. Together these two liturgies created a so-called "greater liturgy", in musicologist Ingmar Milveden's terminology.<sup>13</sup> Sisters and brothers not only formed a spiritual but also an administrative unit, a so-called double abbey, where the brothers and sisters resided within the same cloistered area though separated within it. Though double monastery is a more common term for this construction, I prefer double abbey since an abbess and not an abbot was the head of a Birgittine abbey.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in their abbey church, the groups had separate spaces when celebrating their liturgies, which were said in succession with the brothers' Office said first, followed by the sisters'.<sup>15</sup> The brothers' liturgy is in no source attributed to Magister Petrus, which is to be expected since it followed the diocesan liturgy, and thus will not be treated here.<sup>16</sup>

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12 Morris & Searby 2015, pp. 241–242.

13 Milveden 1972–1973, pp. 35–48.

14 Nyberg discusses the role and function of the Birgittine brothers in depth in Nyberg 1991, pp. 111–130. The practical implication of the highly complicated double abbey solution is discussed in Nyberg 2017, pp. 13–23.

15 The architecture of the Birgittine abbey church is outlined by Eva Lindqvist Sandgren in 'The organization of the Birgittine abbey church in Vadstena: An innovative recycling of established concepts' in this volume.

16 The custom is established in chapter 18 in the *Revelaciones Extravagantes*. See Morris & Searby 2015, p. 242, and *Rev. Extr.*, p. 129.

THE MEDIEVAL SOURCES ON MAGISTER PETRUS AND  
THE BIRGITTINE NARRATIVE

Not much is known about Magister Petrus before he was appointed Birgitta's confessor and accompanied her to Rome in 1349.<sup>17</sup> It is in Vadstena Abbey's memorial book, the *Diarium Vadstenense*, that we find the earliest known reference to the *Cantus sororum* on the item on Magister Petrus' death in 1378, stating that "hic dictavit Cantum sororum" ["he dictated/composed the *Song of the sisters/Cantus sororum*"].<sup>18</sup> Was this a general description of the repertoire that the sisters were to sing, or was this the assigned title of a codified set of texts and melodies? We do not know. What the *Diarium Vadstenense* further tells us is that Magister Petrus took up activities as a singing teacher in the community in Vadstena after his return from Rome in 1374, a position he can only have held for four years at the most.<sup>19</sup>

Further investigations in the authorship of Magister Petrus leads to a most interesting source: an *ordo cantus* or *ordinarius* (instructions on the performance of chant and liturgy) informing us that Magister Petrus had not completed *Cantus sororum* at the time of his death. Written in Vadstena, the *ordo cantus* is written in Latin and dated 1481. The document is a translation of another document written during the second half of the 15th century, according to Latinist Monica Hedlund, and has a complicated transmission history. The translation was done in Danish not long after 1450 in either Vadstena or in a Danish Birgittine abbey. This document in turn was based on an ordinal from 1450.<sup>20</sup> The task of completing the *Cantus sororum* was accomplished, according to this source, by one of the brothers who was among the oldest who first entered the abbey.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, no more precise information is given on what this work of continuing Magister Petrus' work comprised or who undertook it. But there is a potential candidate. In October 1384, the same year that the abbey officially opened, Brother Kettilmund died. He is mentioned as one of the first brothers in Vadstena and an excellent choir leader. He was the one who first taught the sisters to sing, according to the *Diarium Vadstenense*.<sup>22</sup> Kettilmund is mentioned as being a vicar before the

17 Historian Helge Nordahl has tried to gather all available information about Magister Petrus, see Nordahl 2007.

18 *DV* 35. A more thorough investigation of medieval sources mentioning Magister Petrus is found in Servatius 1991.

19 *DV* 104.

20 Hedlund 1981, pp. 122–123, 127.

21 Servatius 1990, pp. 228–229. The text is partly edited and discussed in Hedlund 1981, pp. 121–136. Unfortunately, the passage on Magister Petrus is not included in this edition.

22 *DV* 41.

relics arrived at Vadstena (1374).<sup>23</sup> Kettilmund was thus in Vadstena before 1378 when Magister Petrus died, and had a direct link to him. Kettilmund might have been this composing brother, but it is something on which we can only speculate.

What is really interesting is that this information is not found in other documents, nor is it addressed by modern scholars apart from Hedlund and Servatius. The copy of now-lost original documents opens for a possibility that the scribe in c. 1450 had misinterpreted the information. Another possible interpretation is that this shared compositional activity does not weave the genius of Magister Petrus into the Birgittine narrative. Moreover, the canonization process for Magister Petrus that was initiated shortly after Birgitta's death was never completed. Two *vitae* were written in probably 1426–1427 and 1486, but only one of them mentions that Magister Petrus was responsible for composing (here “dictare” is used) the *Cantus sororum*.<sup>24</sup>

#### MAGISTER PETRUS AND THE *CANTUS SORORUM* IN BIRGITTA'S REVELATIONS

The *Cantus sororum* is also mentioned in Birgitta's Revelations. Again, we do not know if this mention refers to the general singing of the sisters or to a specified repertoire. Whatever the case, Birgitta speaks in favour of Petrus' skills. One example of Birgitta's praise can be found in Birgitta's Revelations, where Christ praises the piety of Magister Petrus, the Virgin Mary asks Birgitta to tell Magister Petrus that “he [Magister Petrus] is one of the priests whom God loves most in the world. This is why he was given the gift of composing the chant that is the gold that will give comfort to many people”.<sup>25</sup>

What is more interesting is that there are four direct references to chants, in the form of two hymns and two antiphons, that can be found in the Rule and in the Extravagantes in Birgitta's Revelations. Of these four chants, only one has something unique; the rest are common Marian chants. The hymn *Ave maris stella*, the antiphon *Salve regina*, and the antiphon *Ave Maria* are all standard chants from the common stock of Gregorian chants. The hymn *Sponse jungendo* is a different matter. This hymn is a contrafact of *Veni creator spiritus*, meaning a new text added to an already existing melody. The text is unique to the Birgittines and might very well have been written by Magister Petrus, but the melody is one of the most well known melodies in the Grego-

<sup>23</sup> DV 41.

<sup>24</sup> Aili 1995–1997.

<sup>25</sup> English translation in Morris & Searby 2015, p. 235. “... quod ipse est vnus de illis sacerdotibus, quos Deus maxime diligit in mundo, propter quod dabatur ei illum cantum dictare, qui est aurum, quod erit multis in solacium.” Latin quote from *Rev. Extr.* 6:2.



rian hymn repertoire. It is odd that nothing more original was put forth in these influential, canonical texts that could be attributed to Magister Petrus' own creativity. For example, why is there not a great responsory mentioned in Birgitta's Revelations, of which there are several not found outside the Birgittines and which are longer pieces and musically more challenging? Perhaps it was more important to stress the common element in the Birgittine liturgy instead of pointing to its originality. We must remember that in the 14th century, a new monastic order had to compete with many already well-established orders on the monastic map. In this landscape, I argue that the Birgittines needed to find their own relevance and legitimacy. Pointing to common traits instead of its originality can have been a tactical strategy.

#### BIRGITTA'S HOUSEHOLD IN ROME AND THE FORERUNNERS IN VADSTENA

One group that probably was highly influential but has remained in the shadows is Birgitta's household in Rome. We know the names of a few of these people, and these names allow us to reflect on the possibility of liturgical contributions on their part. A list of known names is as follows:

*Petrus Olavi*, prior in the Cistercian Alvastra Abbey.

*Gudmar Fredriksson*, priest. According to the *Diarium Vadstenense*, he was Birgitta's house chaplain and followed her to the Holy Land in 1372, as well as one of those who brought Birgitta's relics from Rome to Vadstena, where he resided until his death.<sup>26</sup>

*Magnus Petri* (Tre liljor) later became a Birgittine brother and eventually ended up in the Birgittine Maria Paradiso Abbey in Florence.

*Ingeborg Dannäs* (*Bielke*), noblewoman and good friend of Birgitta.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, Birgitta's daughter Katarina spent periods in Rome, and servants also belonged to the household whose names we often do not know. These people were all capable of contributing to the working out of the liturgy, in particular Petrus Olavi and Gudmar Fredriksson, who both had liturgical training.

According to the *Revelationes Extravagantes*, chapter 65, Birgitta's household was to function as a miniature abbey: "How Birgitta's Servants should Arrange their Daily Life in Rome":

<sup>26</sup> *DV* 48.

<sup>27</sup> Stolpe 1974, pp. 10–11.



- 4 hours of sleep before midnight
- 4 hours of sleep after midnight
- 4 hours of prayers or other devotions, and useful work
- 2 hours at table
- 6 hours for necessary tasks
- 2 hours for vespers, compline, and devotional prayers
- 2 hours for mealtime and suitable relaxation.<sup>28</sup>

The similarity with a monastery is obvious, which is why I think we need to think of Birgitta's household as a place where daily duties and tasks could be tested and later used as a model for the life in Vadstena.

Parallel to Birgitta's household in Rome, a group in Vadstena likewise led a semi-monastic life. We do not know when they started to live together but there existed some kind of community when Magister Petrus arrived there with Birgitta's relics in 1374.<sup>29</sup> It is reasonable to assume that this group had been there from the year 1370 when papal approbation for the Order was given, or perhaps even earlier, since Birgitta's monastic visions and plans for the future abbey were already initiated in the 1360s.<sup>30</sup> When it comes to origin of the liturgy used in Vadstena in the 1370s, we can only speculate, but two strong candidates are 1) the secular cathedral liturgy in Linköping or 2) the among lay people popular hours for the Virgin Mary, commonly called *Horae de Beate Marie Virginis* or *Officium parvum beate Marie Virginis* (here called *Horae de BMV*); or a mix of both liturgies. *Horae de BMV* was an Office of which there existed numerous variants in the Middle Ages but no standard version. It was an Office structured around texts in honour of the Virgin Mary and it is therefore not possible to say exactly which version formed the basis for the *Cantus sororum*. My point is that the *Cantus sororum* is based on an idea that was common to many people in the Middle Ages and that idea was eventually transformed into a repertoire unique to the Birgittines.<sup>31</sup> Seen in the light of what we know about the sisters' and brothers' liturgies from preserved Vadstena sources, the most likely alternative is that the men observed the Linköping liturgy as the brothers did in the fully developed abbey from 1384, and the women the

28 Morris & Searby 2015, p. 283.

29 Gejrot 2007, pp. 91–94.

30 The process is described in Klockars 1976, pp. 156–162.

31 Gy has investigated the relation between the *Cantus sororum* and the *Horae de BMV* in Gy 1972. In 1495, an Office book for *Horae de BMV* was printed in Vadstena Abbey and used in the dioceses of Linköping and Skara. Though mariocentric in its character, it shows little resemblance with the *Cantus sororum* apart from very standardized elements such as Marian antiphons and hymns such as *Salve regina* and *Ave maris stella*; Hagberg 2008.

*Horae de BMV*; in other words, two liturgies that they were probably already familiar with. One hypothesis about how the *Cantus sororum* emerged is that Magister Petrus conveyed to Vadstena a fragmentary liturgy into which elements were incorporated from the *Horae de BMV*, which then was revised and adapted until a definitive version was reached by later generations of Birgittines.

#### A TITLE IS NOT A TABLE OF CONTENTS—THE QUESTION OF DATING THE *CANTUS SORORUM*

The question of dating the *Cantus sororum* and a more precise content is interesting to discuss in relation to the *Responsiones Vadstenenses* (in the following *Responsiones*). These are letters exchanged between Syon Abbey and Vadstena Abbey during the years 1426–1427.<sup>32</sup> The letters contain questions regarding a number of issues that Syon Abbey found unclear in the Birgittine Rule and the answers from Vadstena are therefore highly interesting since they clarify these matters which sometimes are difficult to interpret. Many matters were discussed, including liturgy, and the answers are sometimes justified with the divine origin of the Order. In the *Responsiones*, it becomes clear that the authenticity of the Birgittine origin is important to the Order's identity, and that the Birgittines in Vadstena are fully aware that they have a special and unique liturgy called the *Cantus sororum*. Two examples will illustrate this:

1. Syon Abbey asks whether the sisters are allowed to add or vary the *Cantus sororum* in any way. The answer is that this not is permitted since it is believed that the *Cantus sororum* was created by the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> In this passage, the liturgy is not mentioned in connection with either Birgitta's or Magister Petrus' names but is assigned an ever higher, divine origin and clearly demonstrates the view that the *Cantus sororum* is a divinely inspired creation in the 1420s.

2. Concerning uses during Lent, Syon Abbey asks if the sisters may sing vespers after the midday meal during Lent, in contrast to the custom of the Catholic Church.<sup>34</sup> Vadstena answers that since the *Cantus sororum* is extraordinary and different from the universal chant, they are not limited to the observance of that particular custom. A difference in the character of the chant of the Birgittine sisters during Lent is also

32 Edited and discussed in Andersson 2011.

33 "Questio: An sorores possunt variare Cantum vel addere, etc. Responsio: Credimus, quod non licet, cum a Spiritu Sancto, ut creditur, sit editus, sed in officiis et missis, prout in ordinario earum traditur, per totum ordinem immutabiliter et inviolabiliter observatur." Andersson 2011, pp. 108–109.

34 What is meant by the custom of the Catholic Church is unfortunately not further explained.

pointed out, where the “ecclesiastical chant during Lent is mournful and penitent, and the chant of the sisters is solemn, according to the Rule”.<sup>35</sup>

These two examples show that the idea of the *Cantus sororum* as divinely inspired and a different liturgy from the rest of the Catholic Church is a notion fully embraced by the Birgittines in 1427. I think that the *Cantus sororum* to which the brothers from Syon Abbey referred is what we today know as this repertoire. The 1420s is an interesting and turbulent period in the Birgittine Order. Consequently, it is most likely that this troublesome time fostered a situation when it was important to codify a liturgical work that had been ongoing for about 50 years. This decade was followed by the dedication of the abbey church in 1430 in Vadstena. This was an important physical and symbolic event. With regard to the manuscript situation, it was now possible to make authoritative copies of the liturgy, which I believe were duly made. I claim that the dedication in 1430 was paired with the completion of the Birgittine sisters’ liturgy that would be transmitted in an astonishingly consistent form to other Birgittine abbeys. The material as well as the immaterial foundations for the Birgittine liturgy were now laid out in Vadstena as an example to follow in the foundations.

Other scholars have pointed out the relation between codified liturgies and the dedication of liturgical rooms.<sup>36</sup> Although these correspondences between dedicated church rooms and liturgies concern quite different contexts, where Lund Cathedral is one example, this remains a hypothesis concerning Vadstena Abbey. But the sources support such a hypothesis since we have the first notated manuscripts from the middle of the 15th century. We now have access to fully notated liturgical books for both Mass and Office for the sisters. So, what did they use before this time? The answer is we cannot be certain. It might have been exactly what we find in these sources, or it might have been something else. One suggestion is the embryo theory; liturgies expanded from a smaller repertoire that grew larger over time and became richer and richer. Another hypothesis is that the first steps were a patchwork from which standardization was eventually singled out. The question is why no earlier sources have been preserved. It is very possible that the earlier versions were discarded and actively destroyed to make sure that everyone used the same, authorized liturgy, and it was important that

35 “Questio: Utrum liceat sororibus in quadragesima cantare vespere post prandium contra consuetudinem ecclesie. Responsio: Quia Cantus sororum est singularis et distinctus a cantu universali, ideo ad illam observanciam consuetudinis, ut videtur, non artantur. Nam cantus ecclesiasticus tempore quadragesime est lugubris et penitentialis, sororum vero cantus sollemnis secundum regulam.” Andersson 2011, pp. 110–111. The *Lucidarium* states that the Birgittine sisters always observed feasts in their Office: “Thy at systrana haffua altidh högtidh.” [“The sisters always observe feast days”]; Klemming 1883–1884, p. 60.

36 Ciardi 2004, pp. 16–17. Further discussed in Lagergren, forthcoming.

no incorrect versions circulated for practical reasons. This is the core of the problem: it is an anachronism when discussing Birgittine liturgy from the 14th century to use 15th-century sources.

Once we have notated sources from Vadstena, we also find notated sources from other foundations which are remarkably consistent in their transmission. No deviations or earlier versions are found.<sup>37</sup> There are no preserved notated sources from the earliest foundations, founded before 1430. Marienbrunn in Gdansk was founded in 1396 (closed in 1835) and Maria Paradiso in Florence was founded in 1392 (closed in 1776). We have no such early sources from these abbeys either.<sup>38</sup> Maybe their books were “withdrawn” and replaced by the correct material.

### PRESUMPTIVE CHRONOLOGY

Having presented an outline of how the process leading to a codified *Cantus sororum* might have taken place, I will now summarize my arguments and propose a chronology:

- In Rome, Magister Petrus assisted by Birgitta and her household created an outline of what has become known as the *Cantus sororum*. Different solutions were tried in Birgitta’s semi-monastic household.
- From the 1370s, this liturgy was revised, expanded, reworked, exchanged, etc. This work was initiated in Rome and continued in Vadstena where inspiration was drawn from the Linköping Cathedral liturgy and the *Horae de BMV*. Here, a question can be posed: did Brother Kettilmund continue Magister Petrus’ work?
- Between 1373 and 1391, chants from the Offices *Birgitta matris inclite* and *Rorans bonitatem* were included in the *Cantus sororum*. I propose that this was made close to 1391, which is the year of canonization of Birgitta.
- The work continued and gradually became a corpus including the Mass repertoire and the sisters’ extensive sequence repertoire.<sup>39</sup> The greater liturgy comprising the Masses and Offices for both sisters and brothers was created and formed one spiritual unity.
- In the 1420s, the Birgittine Order went through a major crisis where the Order was questioned both from within the Order and by papal authorities. The

<sup>37</sup> Further discussed in Lagergren, forthcoming.

<sup>38</sup> The Birgittine antiphoner S-Sk: A 84 (National Library of Sweden) *Antiphonarium et hymnarium sanctae Birgitta*, from the second part of 15th century, is presumed to have belonged to the Birgittine Maria Paradiso Abbey but the provenance has not been possible to determine.

<sup>39</sup> The Birgittine Mass and Sequence repertoire is discussed in Strinnholm Lagergren 2015.

double abbey solution was questioned by the papacy and there were conflicts within the Order concerning the question on authority. This led to a need to codify documents important for the Birgittines, in order to strengthen and achieve uniformity in their lives.

- In 1426 and 1427, letters were exchanged between Syon Abbey and Vadstena regarding, among other things, the Birgittine liturgy. Given the normative character of the answers, by all likelihood a corpus existed at this time that can be defined as what we know today as the *Cantus sororum*. The divine status of this Office is emphasized.
- 1430 dedication of the abbey church in Vadstena. The Birgittine liturgy for both sisters and brothers including the *Cantus sororum* is codified.
- After 1430, the transmission of this *Cantus sororum* to other foundations begins. Earlier versions are withdrawn. The first notated liturgical sources of the *Cantus sororum* from other foundations are from the last quarter of the 15th century.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Returning to the question that spurred this examination of sources and arguments, what does it mean to attribute *Cantus sororum* to Magister Petrus? Putting forth Magister Petrus as its originator places *Cantus sororum* close to Birgitta. Her charisma blends into this chant repertoire and she charges the *Cantus sororum* with divine status and legitimacy. Likewise, Magister Petrus' work is given divine status through Birgitta's Revelations. Birgitta's authority was by this process transmitted into the sisters' liturgy, functioning as a guarantee that the repertoire will not be altered since this would be an attack on its divine origin. It is not uncommon that medieval repertoires were attributed to someone who most likely or absolutely did not, in the modern sense of the word, compose them. The overall purpose of such an attribution was to give *auctoritas* to the repertoire. During the Middle Ages, many musical works were attributed to bishops, people who probably never would have the time to compose music, but rather are to be seen as people who put their name under a project they initiated. Musicologist Thomas Forrest Kelly has summarized this strategy as "famous pieces get attributed to famous people".<sup>40</sup> I think that Magister Petrus is a good example of this principle, and the idea of a composing celebrity furthermore fits nicely into ideas and views on authorship, creativity, and originality, current in the 19th- and 20th-century concepts of how art originates, and is in my view one reason why the idea of Magister

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40 Kelly 2010, p. 107.

Petrus as composer of the *Cantus sororum* has been maintained throughout Birgittine scholarship.

Lastly, we must not forget the Birgittine sisters. They have not been emphasized in the source material but there is really nothing that speaks against their active participation and agency in working on the Birgittine liturgy. On the contrary, they perhaps had the most active role given that there were always more sisters than brothers in a Birgittine community, as prescribed in the Rule: 60 sisters and 13 brothers in the ideal case. This would mean that the sisters both in the capacity of being the larger community had more people who could conduct this kind of task but also because the brothers had many duties that the sisters did not have to undertake. All in all, a Birgittine abbey housed a large number of people—the sisters—who had the time to carry out work on the liturgy. The question to what extent the *Cantus sororum* is not only a repertoire for the Birgittine sisters, but also a work by the sisters themselves, is of course impossible to answer, but interesting to reflect on in the light of what we know about their activities in embroidery and book illumination where they were most active.<sup>41</sup>

My hope is that by this examination I have been able to offer an alternative look at the creation of the *Cantus sororum*. I have in particular highlighted the collective effort and the teamwork I believe was more important in the creation process. Attempts at new practices and on-going discussions in the community must have been important in shaping what is today known as the *Cantus sororum*. The result has become an Office liturgy that to this day keeps scholars busy and still offers many topics for future research.

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41 Two publications on this topic are Sandgren 2021 and Hedström 2009.

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EVA LINDQVIST SANDGREN

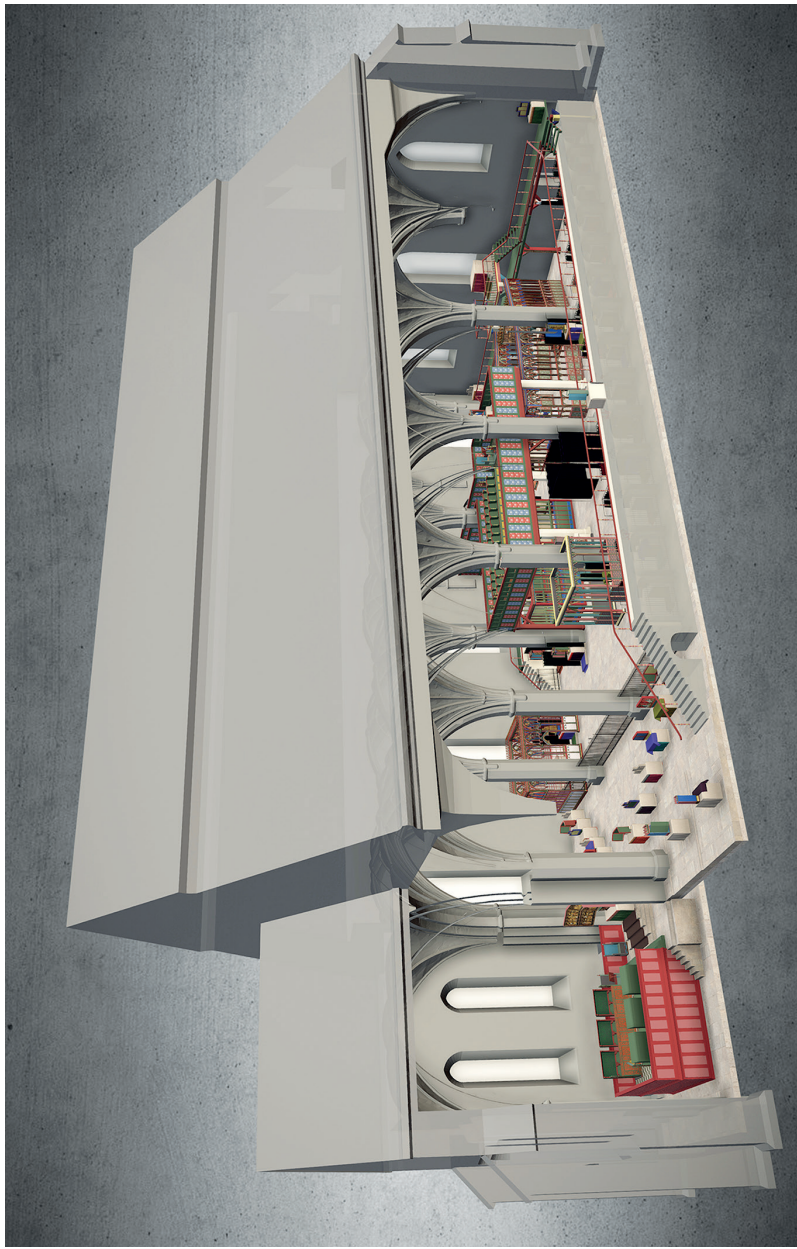
# The Organization of the Birgittine Abbey Church in Vadstena

## *An Innovative Recycling of Established Concepts*

Recycling as a concept is a new phenomenon with an accordingly short history. Commonly, we relate the term to the reuse of items and materials, but ideas and concepts may also be relaunched and recycled. This is evident, for example, when it comes to the history of art, where old motifs and compositions are reused repeatedly through time. Sometimes even ideas/concepts can be relaunched, preferably in a new shape or context. Artists borrow from each other. This can be most exciting and challenging when the concepts face a new audience.

The medieval Western church relied on old concepts and repeatedly had to fight against heresies. The Late Middle Ages were no exception from this, with new theological (heretical) ideas surfacing now and then that had to be suppressed by the Catholic Church. It was in this wider context of heresies that Saint Birgitta acted when she criticized the pope and many other Catholic Church representatives. Saint Birgitta, of course, considered herself a pious woman and strove to be a genuine Christian. Because she belonged to the nobility in Sweden, she also had secular training that made her courageous in her actions, even in relation to the highest potentates, such as the pope. She was most familiar with Christian concepts and was therefore well informed when she criticized those who she believed deviated from the true Christian faith.

In return for her criticism, Saint Birgitta and her humble followers were severely criticized and questioned—were they not heretics after all? Consequently, it took some time before her order was approved by the pope in 1370, three years before she died. The most severe attacks against the saint and her monastic foundation were however pronounced later, at the Council of Constance at the beginning of the 15th cen-



*Fig. 1. The interior of Vadstena Abbey church in the 1470s. Digital 3D church model, full view from south. © Eva Lindqvist Sandgren & Carolina Ask.*

ture (1414–1418).<sup>1</sup> The first three decades of that century marked a period when the monastery in Vadstena was under construction and an intense phase of work took place at the new abbey church. In the 1420s, just a couple of years after the closing of the council, the vaults of the abbey church were raised, and in 1442 its main altar was consecrated.<sup>2</sup> When the building work was completed, it then had a protruding choir, placed in the west, and the main entrances were located in the eastern wall, i.e., in the complete opposite direction normally chosen in a church. Why?

In an attempt to answer that question, this article will investigate the instructions regarding the building of the abbey church, as evidenced in the Revelations,<sup>3</sup> as well as examine the existing building and what is documented about the changes that took place during the centuries after the monastery was closed in 1595. The questions underlying this investigation concern how the interior was furnished and in what aspects this followed, or did not follow, the common traditions of the Western church. Was the abbey indeed an upside-down structured building, i.e., maybe heretical, even in its interior design? Or was it an innovative way of putting things together, for a very particular purpose? Did Saint Birgitta invent something unorthodox, or did she reuse familiar pious concepts in an innovative way? To be able to perceive the church's interior spaces, a pilgrim's visit to Vadstena Abbey in 1470 will serve as a guide and illustrative "walk" around in the church.

#### IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF A 1470 PILGRIM

Almost 30 years after the consecration of the main altar, there is an account of a pilgrim visiting Vadstena, in hopes of being cured. It is one of these rare authentic descriptions from the Middle Ages telling us how people traversed and behaved in religious spaces. The story is one of the miracles (no. 24) recorded for the canonization process for Katarina of Vadstena, the daughter of Saint Birgitta. The miracles were mainly collected in the 1460s–1470s, and this one took place in 1470.<sup>4</sup>

A woman from a nearby village, Christina Torstensdotter of Gärdslätt, thought she had been poisoned and went to Vadstena to obtain help for her stomach pains. She approached the space outside the church by the same route used by everyone, passing by the Calvary Hill in the church yard, located halfway to the church. Just before the church, she stopped at the door of the brothers' convent, requesting to meet the gen-

1 The Catholic Church had been occupied with the papal schism from 1378 until 1415.

2 *DV* 308, 529.

3 Morris & Searby 2006–2015, an English edition.

4 *Vita Katherine*, pp. 77–78.

eral confessor, but she was denied this since he was occupied. Therefore, she continued to the church and went in. We may presume she went in through the south porch and headed along the south side, passing several lay altars and chapels, many of them lined up along the elevated ambulatories on her left side. On her right side, she passed by the Birgitta chapel and the elevated great gallery of the sisters, positioned in the middle of the church (*Fig. 1*). She did not stop until she came to the tomb of Katarina of Vadstena, located next to the north-western pillar, adjacent to the enclosed area. This was as far west a lay person could proceed in the church. At the slightly raised tomb, there were candles burning and votive gifts, a sign of Katarina's ability to help those who in prayer humbly called for her assistance. This was in the morning, when the daily mass was celebrated, and Christina could hear the monastics singing. She had walked for several hours to get to Vadstena, and since she also was ill, she became very tired and fell asleep at the tomb. While sleeping, a kind, beautiful woman appeared and told her to go to "my mother's altar" and walk around it on her knees. When Christina woke up, she did as she was told and went across the church, towards the eastern part where the Birgitta altar was. On her way, partially walking under the sisters' great gallery, she passed several minor altars and chapels. Then, standing in front of the Birgitta altar, below the raised Marian choir in the east, she kneeled and started her knee-walking circuit of the great Birgitta altar. She became very fatigued by the walk but recuperated and covered her aching knees to be able to perform a second walk, the same route as before. Just as she had finished her second circuit, the churchwarden gave the signal for everyone to leave the church, as it was time to close the church for the day. Christina left the church, presumably by the north-eastern porch, and headed for the city. She did get better, the account tells us, but she had to rest in Vadstena some days before she could return home to her village.

The facts we glean from this account do not so much concern the fine details regarding exactly where and how objects were arranged in the church, but rather regard the general layout: that there was some distance between the entrance portals and Katarina's tomb, and that it was possible to walk around the Birgitta altar. These two places were not planned for in the original church construction proposal. They were additions to the original plan, made by the monastery to make the abbey an appropriate site of pilgrimage. Saint Birgitta however, had, in her instructions, explicitly left space for lay altars to be raised in the middle of the great church, which also later took place. For this large space in the middle of the church, she gave no more instructions. Her focus was on the monastics and their enclosed area that surrounded the lay people.

## THE INSTRUCTIONS IN THE REVELATIONS

Even though Saint Birgitta had given detailed instructions for many aspects of the church layout, she also left various questions to be solved by the craftsmen and for her followers to interpret. For example, she instructed the approximate height of how far above the floor the sisters' gallery should be placed but did not mention how long or wide it should be.<sup>5</sup>

Saint Birgitta prefaces the building instructions for the abbey church in the Revelations, (chapter 28 of Book 9) by declaring that Christ revealed to her that "the choir" should be placed in the west, next to the large lake (Lake Vättern). The choir referred to is then defined not as the main choir but as the brethren's choir and placed between the western church wall and the main altar, so that "the brothers will be standing between the main altar and the western wall."<sup>6</sup>

To have a choir attached to the main church building was nothing new, but this placement of it was uncommon. Most churches have their main choir and/or Marian choir as a more or less projecting structure connected to the main body of the building. The difference is that they are commonly placed in the east. What Saint Birgitta does, instructed by Christ, is turn the direction of the church around by 180 degrees. The extended choir is in the west and, consequently, the main entrances on the opposite side are in the east. Looking at the plan itself, it seems most ordinary, but adding the point of the compass makes the "normal" plan most abnormal.

Immediately after defining the measurements of the main choir and its altars in the west, Saint Birgitta, in the Revelations, turns her attention to the eastern wall of the church and states that there should be two entrance doors, placed at the side bays, rather than at the end of the nave. The enclosed Marian altar was to be placed in between the two doors and against the eastern wall. From this we can conclude that the Marian altar was placed within the main body of the building, rather than in an extended chapel, as is often seen in other churches. After this passage, it becomes more difficult to follow the instructions, a difficulty it seems that the builders in Vadstena might also have had. Saint Birgitta states that the Marian altar was to be reached by stairs and have a single entrance. Possibly, she had the idea of stairs leading down into the church from a higher eastern entrance level, but that this became impossible to fulfil due to the topographical circumstances at Vadstena.<sup>7</sup> The building efforts resulted instead in a raised Marian choir, but seemingly without direct connection to the lay people's lower space.

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5 *Rev. Extr.* 28.

6 *Rev. Extr.* 28.

7 Anderson 1991, p. 73, fig. 75.



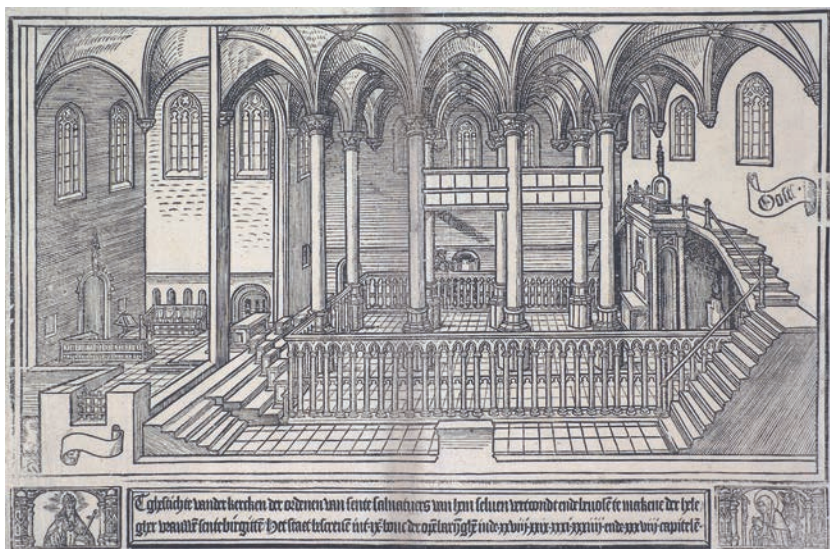


Fig. 2. A Birgittine church interior according to the Revelations. Dutch woodcut on paper, 39.6 x 25.8 cm, single leaf and fragment: 288 Et 1/V:15. © National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

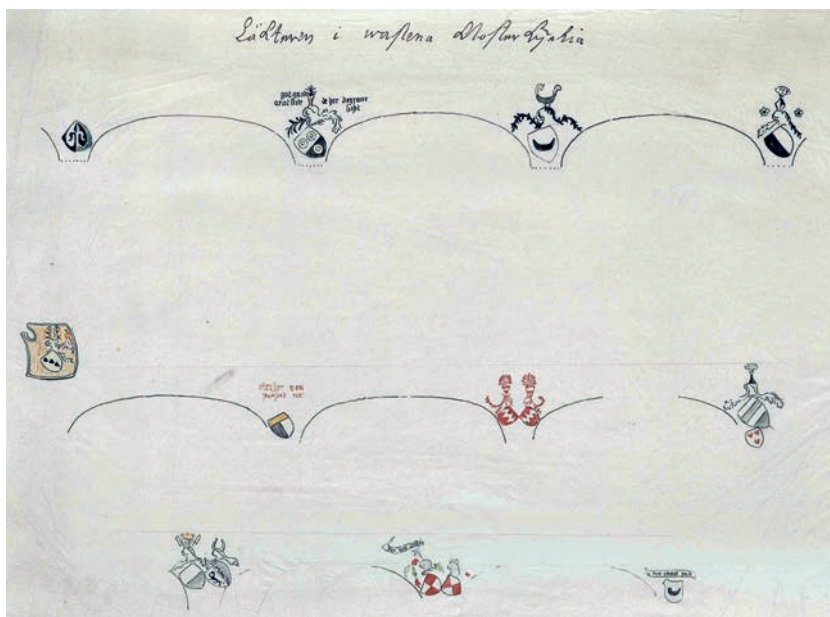


Fig. 3. Heraldic drawings on paper by Elias Brenner, c. 36 x 22.5 cm, Brenner HS FM 30 (=DG Nescher 89). © National Library of Sweden, Stockholm.

This design can also be seen in a Dutch woodcut from the early 15th century, presenting a Birgittine church interior according to the Revelations (*Fig. 2*).

How Saint Birgitta laid out the passages for the priest brothers, when they wanted to reach the Marian altar from the ambulatories along the sides of the church, is also unclear. It is evident, however, that the Vadstena masons, as well as their followers in Nådendal and Maribo, placed the required ambulatories on a raised level instead of at floor level (as shown in the woodcut). The ambulatories are still preserved at Maribo, and their run has been archaeologically investigated in Nådendal.<sup>8</sup> In Vadstena, they were present until 1692, when they were taken down. Their existence is evidenced by two grave plans from the mid- and late 17th century and by the drawings of their wall paintings executed by Elias Brenner in the same century (*Fig. 3*).<sup>9</sup> However, there are no surviving traces of how the ambulatories were linked to the Marian choir. When the grave plans were drawn, the Marian choir was gone, as well as its connecting stairs. From the grave plans, we may also conclude, and this is also testified by documentation in the early 19th century, that the position of the Birgitta altar did not change from 1459 until the 1820s, when the eastern part of the church was reorganized to a slightly raised choir and the great altar piece from the local parish church of St Per replaced the Birgitta altarpiece (*Fig. 4*).

The two long ambulatories and the stairs around the Marian choir certainly made it possible for the brothers to walk around inside the church, all the way from their choir behind the main altar to the Marian choir, and back again, as a circuit. The projecting choir in the west was their “home”, from which they could reach all the altars they needed to reach to celebrate mass for the sisters’ sake, and it was also useful for the brothers’ own liturgical processions. When the sisters performed their processions around the cloister walk, the brothers could perform their processions on the ambulatories, since they had no proper cloister walk.

What can be concluded from the above discussion is that a Birgittine church has the ordinary elements of a projecting choir, a Marian choir, altars, ambulatories, and main entrance for the lay people. The composition of these elements is, however, a total remodelling by placing the main choir and the projecting monk choir in the west, and the entrances in the east (*Fig. 1*). The Marian choir is however and, as usual, in the east, but on an elevated level and inaccessible to lay people. Together with the main choir, the brothers’ choir, and the Marian choir, the ambulatories encompass the building

8 Lilius 1990, pp. 151–157, Norn *et al.* 1948, pp. 44, 47, figs. 5–8.

9 Grave plans from 1653 and the 1670s, see UUB Palmskiöld 294 p. 171 (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:alvin:portal:record-95972>), and p. 173 (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:alvin:portal:record-95957>).



*Fig. 4. View of eastern parts and main altar. Photograph: Sigurd Curman 1889, ATA, (CC BY 2.5 SE).*

interior, instead of just being a circuit walk in the eastern part of the church. They have no function for the lay people, simply serving the brothers and even compensating for the lack of a cloister walk in the brothers' cloister.

## A PLACE FOR THE SAINT

When Saint Birgitta received her revelations, there was of course no particular place set out for herself in the plan. This absence of the great saint in her most prominent place on earth had to be solved by her followers. Her relics were present in Vadstena and had to be exposed for it to become a pilgrimage site. An arrangement had to be made in the church, within the requirements Saint Birgitta had defined for the site. Some prominent persons in the monastic context seem to have been buried in the main choir in the west, such as Birgitta's own granddaughter, the first abbess, Ingegerd Knutsdotter.<sup>10</sup> Being buried close to the Marian choir was desired by many, not just in Vadstena but in any church; unsurprisingly this spot was a crowded area in Vadstena, judging by the number of tombstones on the aforementioned grave plans. That certain areas were more "popular" for burials has also been indicated by an unpublished ground penetrating radar (GPR) investigation in the church.<sup>11</sup> But the relics of the saint should not be buried but revered. How should this be resolved?

Unfortunately, the sources are very scant when it comes to the place where Saint Birgitta's relics were kept. Some relics were given to daughter monasteries, but the main body parts were of course kept in Vadstena. The gilded silver shrine, the reliquary containing the saint's relics, was listed in the closing inventory of 1595 but without mention of its location in the church.<sup>12</sup> Even the notes from the great silver tax of 1539 gives no hints of its place.<sup>13</sup> When the grave plans were made, the heavy shrine had already been melted down and its content dispersed. Reading the memorial book gives no more clues to the silver shrine's placement in the church than that it once was taken out and placed in the main choir.<sup>14</sup> This testimony should probably be interpreted that it was an occasional and temporary arrangement, as at the great translation feast of Katarina of Vadstena in 1489.<sup>15</sup>

A medieval pilgrimage site without the main relics exposed is hard to imagine. The shrine must have been exposed somewhere in the church, and at a place where it could be seen and venerated by numerous visitors,<sup>16</sup> preferably also with something exposed to touch or possible to walk under or to get very close to. A pious pilgrim behaviour was to walk around the relics or the altar, as did the aforementioned Christina from

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<sup>10</sup> *DV* 215.

<sup>11</sup> Unpublished GPR reports: Rossi 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Silfverstolpe 1895, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> Källström 1939, pp. 279–285.

<sup>14</sup> *DV* 593 (royal visit by King Karl Knutsson [Bonde] 1448).

<sup>15</sup> Fritz & Elfving 2004, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Eccleston 2019.





*Fig. 5. View from south of the sisters' gallery, the Birgitta chapel, and the Marian choir. Detail of digital 3D reconstruction of the Vadstena Abbey church in the 1470s. © Eva Lindqvist Sandgren & Carolina Ask.*

Gärdslätt.<sup>17</sup> They could also crawl or walk below the shrine, as in the shrine of the three kings in the Cathedral of Cologne or as reported from, for example, the tomb of Edward the Confessor in Westminster Abbey in London.<sup>18</sup> The question is where could this be done in the abbey church of Vadstena? If placed in the main choir in the west, as suggested by Andreas Lindblom, the shrine could be seen by the pilgrims but not accessed.<sup>19</sup> It would also be at distance for the sisters and out of sight for the visiting nobles from their gallery.

A tentative suggestion is that it may have been placed on the same platform as the Marian altar (*Fig. 5*). The elevated location would solve several aspects of accessibility and veneration. The shrine would then have been raised and visible from some distance in the church (depending on where one was standing). The nobles would have been able to see it from their balcony in the northern wall, as well as the sisters at their

<sup>17</sup> Lundén 1950, pp. 118–119.

<sup>18</sup> For a depiction of how pilgrims behaved at the shrine of Edward the Confessor, see Cambridge University Library MS Ee.3.59 (<https://cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-EE-00003-00059/64>)

<sup>19</sup> Lindblom 1965, p. 30, fig. 9.

gallery—if they opened their shutters towards the Marian altar. It would also have been possible for the pilgrims to walk beneath the shrine. This arrangement would give the opportunity to visit and venerate the Holy Virgin at the same time as Saint Birgitta. If standing on the floor in the Birgitta chapel, the shrine would be elevated behind the great Birgitta altar piece with its crowning golden tracery. This would have formed a most efficient exposure, fulfilling all requirements for a saint's shrine to be visited by pilgrims. It created an arrangement with a saint's relics to walk close to, and even under, circulating around the saint's altar and, at the same time being in the proximity of the altar of the holy Virgin Mary. Satisfyingly, this arrangement would accommodate two of the most rewarding pious round walks in the same spot.

The local monastics managed to furnish the church as a suitable pilgrimage site within the structure Saint Birgitta had prescribed. As noted, she had anticipated and prepared the plan allowing the possibility of raising lay altars in the central area of the spacious church, without restrictions. The monastics used the floor of the free space between the Marian altar and the sisters' gallery for their saint. They managed to develop the accommodate the difficulties created by the different gallery levels relative to the floor level. Here they established an intensely sacred site, something more than simply a site of pilgrimage for Saint Birgitta. They placed her shrine in easy access close to the main entrances, close to the Marian choir, and close to the followers of the saint: the sisters in their gallery. It was also a site visible to the nobles, sitting in their gallery at the northern wall.<sup>20</sup> By combining the altars/chapels of the Holy Virgin and Saint Birgitta, this became a very spiritually concentrated area and an almost ideal arrangement, similar to many of the great pilgrimage sites known at the time.

#### A CHURCH IN ONE OR TWO DIRECTIONS?

Looking at the eastern part of the Birgittine abbey church reveals a female-accentuated space where the Holy Virgin Mary had the most prominent place, followed by Saint Birgitta and the sisters (*Fig. 5*). For the lay visitors, the Marian choir was accessible in an indirect or secondary way, as it was possible to walk under it. As noted, this could be done at the same time as walking around the Birgitta altar. An image of the Virgin Mary was probably placed below the elevated chapel, creating a place for lay peoples' devotion and placement of votive gifts below. For the sisters, the arrangement allowed them to simultaneously be directed towards two of the most prominent followers of Christ: the Virgin Mary and Saint Birgitta. They could not go there in person from

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<sup>20</sup> *Rev. Extr.* 28.

their gallery, but from their elevated choir, they had visual access to both prominent altars.

Saint Birgitta placed not only the male inhabitants' choir and the main altar in the western part of the church, as mentioned above (*Fig. 1*), but she also defined the three western bays of the church as the main choir, i.e., the area from the south wall to the north. She likewise furnished the main choir with twelve altars of the Apostles, placed two by two in a V-shaped formation on low steps. The main altar was dedicated to St Peter and St Paul.<sup>21</sup> From the description from the 1489 translation of the relics of St Katarina of Vadstena, it becomes clear that all 13 altars in the main choir were free-standing and that the main altar was bidirectional. At this unique and most solemn occasion in 1489, it was explicitly arranged for the bishop to choose whether he wanted to be positioned on the eastern or the western side of the high altar, when celebrating the mass. Two altar pieces then adorned the main altar, one for the view of the brothers and one directed to the lay people.<sup>22</sup>

Saint Birgitta also placed two altars along the long sides of the great church: one for St John the Baptist (north) and one for the archangel St Michael (south). When describing their position in the ambulatories, she explicitly stated that their directions should deviate: the celebrating priests should be directed towards the north and south respectively,<sup>23</sup> thus, an obvious departure from the normal eastern direction. Since she specified the direction of the deviating altars so specifically, one may assume that the rest of the altars adhered to the normal eastern direction. This proved to be the case when it concerns the twelve apostolic altars. They were directed *ad orientem* (east) and were also *ad populum* (towards the congregation). The western part of the church was thus, when it comes to the prescribed altars, clearly dominated by male saints. It wasn't just the twelve Apostles, and St Peter and St Paul, but also John the Baptist and St Michael. Thus, the components were familiar, but the arrangement was new.

#### FOR WOMEN BY A WOMAN

Saint Birgitta knew very well how a church should be equipped and designed. All the furnishings that could be expected in a medieval Catholic church were found in Vadstena. There was no specific element that deviated from what might be expected in a normal medieval Western church. What is unusual, however, was the way the components were put together. Regardless of where the medieval church was located,

<sup>21</sup> *Rev. Extr.* 28.

<sup>22</sup> Fritz & Elfving 2004, p. 33.

<sup>23</sup> *Rev. Extr.* 28.



it should have its Marian altar, its apostles, saints and so on, and organized to have a main altar and a number of side altars. This structure was in its essence prescribed by Christ in the Revelations, but the abbey was developed by Saint Birgitta's followers in Vadstena into a Birgittine pilgrimage site of the highest rank.

When Saint Birgitta founded her order, she explicitly said it was primarily for women.<sup>24</sup> This is also apparent in the organization of the monastic life of the abbey. The monastery had places for as many as 60 enclosed sisters, but just 25 places for conventual brothers. The brothers' main task was to serve the sisters in their religious life, to celebrate mass, hear confession, give communion, preach, bury and be the sisters' spiritual advisers, etc. The general confessor was the leader of the male convent, but he was hierarchically below the abbess. She ruled the monastery. Her superior was the local bishop, not the general confessor.

The female precedence has been observed by most scholars interested in Vadstena Abbey or the Birgittine Order. What has not been given attention is the female precedence in the organization of the church's interior. The monastic organization is in fact mirrored in the church's inner spaces. On a general level, Saint Birgitta created a spatial context with a male and a female pole in the church, where the Holy Virgin Mary dominates in the east, while the Apostles/disciples dominate in the west, creating a male pole.

The role of the Virgin Mary is indeed prominent in this space, certainly from the sisters' point of view. The Marian altar, at the eastern wall, placed her closest to the direction whence the risen Christ is expected to come on the Judgement Day. Next to her came Saint Birgitta, followed by the sisters. Thereafter came all the prominent male actors, i.e., the Apostles, St Michael, and St John the Baptist. Finally, the brothers line up in the symbolic procession from their choir behind the main altar. This male-dominated, western part of the church in a way also embraced the sisters from behind, with the altars of the apostles lined up in a reversed V-shaped plough, pushing the nuns forward towards the east and the returning Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Master Petrus Olavi and the blessed Katarina, the daughter of Saint Birgitta, two of the most important persons in the establishment of the order and monastery, were also placed in the west and in the proximity of the disciples, and thus close to the main altar. Their graves were located just below the stairs of the main choir, but in the lay church. Their placement may be interpreted as strengthening the group of the Apostles and as integrated among the larger group of disciples. This is in accordance with Saint Birg-

24 *RS* 1; "I want to establish this Order first and foremost for women" (transl. Morris & Searby 2015, p. 127).

25 Sandgren 2021, pp. 251–252.

itta's reasoning when she counted the number of the sisters and the ordained brothers to correspond to the 72 disciples Christ sent out to spread the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

That this monastic establishment was indeed designed foremost for the sisters, and that the conventual brothers' task was to serve the sisters' spiritual needs, is revealed in the complete organization of the church interior, from east to west. The abbey church in its entirety may consequently be described as a symbolic illustration of the summons of Saint Birgitta: *follow me in the same way as I follow Mary, and as Mary followed her son, Christ!*

The Vadstena pilgrim, standing at the enclosing iron fence at the base of the main choir in the west, is therefore in noble company with the Virgin Mary and Saint Birgitta walking ahead. Positioned side by side with the blessed Katarina and Master Petrus Olavi, with all the Apostles and the Birgittine brothers in the back, thus the pilgrim becomes part of the church community, together with all the other visitors in the church present with those buried in the tombs and the many saints of the numerous lay altars.

The space where the pilgrim could move around was not just shared with all the represented saints at their altars, but also enclosed by the interior spaces envisioned by Saint Birgitta. She built her plan on the old concept that the Christian church, as an organization, is a representation of the Virgin Mary, and that each church is an embodiment of this representation. From this concept, she fashioned her foundation, creating the unusual structure of the interior of the church building. Her successors strengthened the church's character with the specific Birgittine additions—the shrine, the Birgitta altar, and the memorial places for Birgitta's daughter Katarina as well as Master Petrus Olavi.

Everything you could find in the abbey church of Vadstena, you may also expect to find in any medieval church. There was nothing in content that deviated from the orthodox faith. The separate items were all there, but deliberately put together to emphasize a certain message. Saint Birgitta and her followers recycled well known elements but reorganized them in a different arrangement. Thereby, the specifically Birgittine peculiarities became not just clarified but also included in common Catholic praxis. This, I think, was a very conscious strategy, where the prerequisites were formulated by Saint Birgitta in the Revelations. At the same time, they were indeed based on established Catholic customs, and then developed further by her, occasionally criticized, followers in the Order of Our Most Holy Saviour (O.S.S.). In this way, the order and Saint Birgitta proved to be the most pious orthodox Christians and indeed not heretical.

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<sup>26</sup> RS 12.

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BIÖRN TJÄLLÉN

## Birgittines in Norrland

### *Agents of Church Reform and Sámi Conversion*

In a revelation from 1346, Birgitta voiced Christ's demand that the Archbishop of Uppsala attend to a neglected part of his diocese:

Finally, as your Lord, I order you to finish what you started. You have followed my way, you thrust your plow into a little patch of land and began to plow. Now I order you: turn and uproot the roots and thorns more habitually. Build churches there with the means of your church. I entrust this patch of the land to your hands, this I ask of you. So work fervently and habitually.<sup>1</sup>

In her revelation, Birgitta was most likely talking about the scarcely populated territories west and north of the Gulf of Bothnia, Norrbotten.<sup>2</sup> Other members of Sweden's clerical and secular elites were certainly interested in "this patch of the land". From the 1320s, they had begun in earnest to colonize the new frontier by taking charge

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- 1 Morris & Searby 2015, p. 272; *Rev. Extr.* 51.23–24: "Tercio precipio tibi quasi dominus, ut, quod incepisti, perficias. Tu iuisti viam meam, tu iactasti aratrum tuum in modicam partem terre et cepesti arare. Nunc precipio tibi: Verte frequencius et extirpa radices et spinas, et edifica ibi ecclesias de bonis ecclesie tue. Hanc partem terre assigno in manus tuas, hanc quaero a te. Ideo labora feruenter et frequenter."
  - 2 We cannot be sure about what Birgitta had in mind, but we know that the revelation was interpreted as concerning Norrbotten from a reference made by a scribe at a meeting between the Archbishop and the Bishop of Turku, when they settled a dispute about their northern borders. For the revelation in this context, see Ahnlund 1920, pp. 216–220. The scribal note is found in copy in Uppsala University Library, MS E 175, p. 33. In the Middle Ages, the toponym Norra botn or Norrebottn comprised a larger area than the modern county of the same name, sometimes including modern Västerbotten and sometimes also land east of the Gulf, see Olofsson 1962, pp. 155, 201. It is in this broader sense that Norrbotten is used in this article, referring to the northernmost parts of Norrland and the Swedish realm.

of the lucrative salmon fishing, providing tax relief for Christian settlers, as well as by establishing new units of secular and ecclesiastical organization.<sup>3</sup> Kings handed out privileges to traders and settlers in order to contribute to the “proliferation of the Swedish realm and the Christian faith”.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, this push into Norrland continued an expansion of Latin Christendom that integrated the south Scandinavian and east European peripheries into its central western core.<sup>5</sup> This expansion had transformed pagan societies, and the integration of northern Scandinavia into the Christian order of church and realm would involve a conversion of the Sámi, a process that had advanced unevenly in different parts of northern Scandinavia since the High Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup>

Birgitta's revelation about the duties of the Swedish archbishop, mentioned above, might be the oldest among a number of sources that connect the Birgittines with northern pastoral care or conversion, and hence provide the order with a role in the history of Norrland and the Sámi. These sources and the historical instances that they relate have not gained attention in Birgittine studies. But three historical episodes have become recurring features in surveys of Sámi history. Firstly, in the decades around 1400, the abbey took an interest in appeals for a northern mission that were made by a Sámi woman, Margareta. The case is of some notoriety because it was supported by the queen of the same name, Margareta Valdemarsdotter.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, in 1419, her heir, King Erik of Pomerania, supported a missionary named Toste, whom some scholars associate with the previous appeals for mission and with the abbey.<sup>8</sup> And thirdly, in 1525, on the eve of the Reformation, one Birgittine friar actually left the abbey to apostolize in Norrbotten.<sup>9</sup> On the grounds of these three events, but without much inquiry into the sources, scholars of Sámi history have attributed an important role to the Birgittines, suggesting that the abbey held a continuous interest in the work of Sámi conversion. Håkan Rydving has described Vadstena as the centre of the attention bestowed by the church on the Sámi.<sup>10</sup>

3 Olofsson 1962, pp. 123–165.

4 *DS* 5959: “the priuilegier, nåder och frij heter [...] som allom jnboandes i Norrebotn i Lapmarcken till Swerigis rijkis och Christna troes föröckning vnthe och giffne ähre”.

5 Bartlett 1994.

6 Rasmussen 2014.

7 Most recent, Tjällén 2018.

8 Hildebrand 1884 (repr. 1983), p. 306; Nordberg 1973, p. 8.

9 Westman 1918, pp. 240, 357–358.

10 Rydving 2016, p. 318. Since at least the mid-19th century, scholars have described Vadstena as the centre of activities to convert the Sámi, see, for instance, Vahl 1866, p. 87; Nordberg 1973, pp. 8–9.



The claim that Vadstena Abbey engaged in subarctic pastoral care and conversion of the Sámi is of obvious interest, not only for what it tells us about the history of Norrland but also for what it tells us about the Birgittines. However, with only three or four historical instances to support this claim, and some of them unclear about the nature and extent of Vadstena's involvement, the evidence for continuous Birgittine interest in Norrland and the Sámi is sparser and more ambiguous than that suggested by the historical surveys. But this issue is too important to neglect. In church history, the scholarship has tended to view Sámi conversion as a product of the Reformation or later evangelical movements. However, if it can be established that the Birgittines played a part in Sámi conversion, this can be added to the mounting evidence that Sámi integration into the church was already well underway in the Later Middle Ages.<sup>11</sup> But this issue is also important for what it tells us about the Birgittines. Birgitta's *Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris* was a new monastic order, with a rule that enforced various degrees of enclosure but with a message of church reform that also involved the laity. In view of this paradox, Stephan Borgehammar has asked just how Birgitta intended her monastic order to accomplish the aim of wholesale Christian reform, and he identified a number of means that were used to communicate with the laity in the liturgical and architectural space of Vadstena Abbey.<sup>12</sup> Norrbotten, however, is not Vadstena and the missionary enterprises would emphatically highlight the dilemma of combining organizational seclusion with ideological inclusiveness. Participating in pastoral care among the Sámi, and in Norrland more generally, might have been consistent with the order's aim of lay reform but perhaps hard to reconcile with its monastic ideal. With this in mind, it seems pertinent to ask in what manner the Birgittines engaged in these projects and how they overcame the challenges involved.

This contribution examines the historical material anew, including sources that have not previously been featured in the discussion. The aim of the inquiry is to gauge the nature and extent of Birgittine involvement in northern pastoral care and conversion. In conceptual and methodological terms, this can be considered as a problem of assessing historical agency and therefore of identifying the ways and means by which the Birgittines had an impact on the northern missions. Agency might be defined straightforwardly as the purposeful action of individual subjects, but it can also be discussed in terms of the structural contingencies that shape these subjects or enable their actions (since economic, institutional or discursive contexts tend to affect our manner of thinking and acting).<sup>13</sup> Of primary interest in this inquiry are instances

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11 Mundal 2007; Rasmussen 2014.

12 Borgehammar 1998, pp. 26–27.

13 The concept is discussed by Shaw 2013.

where members of the order engaged personally. But in each case agency will also be considered more broadly. Vadstena was an influential institution; it made its mark on both the social world and the religious landscape of late medieval Sweden. We must assume that agents could act more or less independently and yet under its sway, which means that it is important to examine links between actors in each case and the abbey. Finally, and most difficult to assess, Vadstena's influence on contemporary spirituality must be considered. Through her writings, her life, and her order, Birgitta's orthodox and yet visionary and inclusive brand of spirituality impacted both the laity and the clergy, and we must ask if it informed the actors who engaged in the enterprise of the northern missions. Did they, for instance, intend to preach in her reforming spirit, or refer to her as an example? Did they share her signature view of the Blessed Virgin Mary, emphasized by Borgehammar, as a symbol of simplicity, humility, and willingness to be poor and suffer for Christ?<sup>14</sup>

This article proceeds in three main steps. The inquiry begins with the last and best-documented mission of 1525, traces backwards through the mission of 1419, and then examines the appeals for mission in 1389–1414. As a coda, which provides an economic context to the Birgittine interest in these latter appeals, the inquiry ends by discussing the fact that the abbey held property in Norrbotten.

#### BROTHER BENGT GOES NORTH

In October 1525, "at the request of our King Gustav, Brother Benedictus Petri left to bring the Laplanders to the worship of God".<sup>15</sup> The would-be missionary Brother Benedictus, or Bengt, was a former canon of Skara, described appreciatively on his entry to the abbey in 1517 as a "man of learning, maturity and devotion".<sup>16</sup> In view of his background and this high praise we can suppose that Bengt was a man of some standing in the community—Vadstena sent one of its best to apostolize in Norrland.

The note about Bengt's farewell in the abbey's *Diarium* is unique in that it names a Birgittine who left the enclosure to actively engage in northern pastoral care and conversion. The case has featured in the scholarship on the Reformation,<sup>17</sup> in general

14 Borgehammar 1998, pp. 43–47, itemizes the means and symbols that helped the Bigittines convey their message of reform, and emphasizes the centrality of Birgitta's view of the Blessed Virgin.

15 *DV* 1107: "Eodem anno, die sancti Gereonis [10 October, 1525] ex mandato regis nostri dominis Gøstavi exivit frater Benedictus Petri ad inducendum populum Lapponicum ad divinam cultum".

16 *DV* 1048.

17 Westman 1918, pp. 240, 357–358.

histories of Norrland,<sup>18</sup> and in studies of Sámi history,<sup>19</sup> but has never been discussed with a focus on the Birgittines. Why did Vadstena engage in a mission in the 1520s, and how should this activity be understood in the context of the order and its history? How was it executed and what were the results? Did the initiative come from the abbey, or did it come from the king?

Apart from the entries in the *Diarium*, letters from the king and from the Bishop of Linköping shed some light on this episode. According to the *Diarium*, Bengt left (“exivit”) the abbey in October 1525, and just over seven months later (5 June 1526), Gustav issued a letter on his behalf, for “her benkth wastena closters brodher” [“master Bengt, brother in Vadstena Abbey”].<sup>20</sup> What Bengt did in the intervening months we cannot say.

Gustav used his influence to support the project. Bengt’s destination was Norrbotten (“in wthj norrebotten”), and Gustav urged royal bailiffs and other officials to facilitate the endeavour. Bengt should take care of:

the poor Lapps and other inhabitants in that part of the country in what concerns their faith in God and the blessing of their souls and, if there is an opportunity, to introduce a school (*scola*) for the aforementioned Lapps and other good children in that part of the country.<sup>21</sup>

Bengt should see to the pastoral care of the Sámi and other people in Norrbotten, presumably in areas poorly integrated in the life of the existing parishes. Perhaps he would establish a more permanent institution, a *scola*, as a means for the continued education in those parts. Unfortunately, we know nothing about the fate of Bengt or his mission or if other Birgittines were involved. If he returned to Vadstena from Norrland, the scribe of the *Diarium* failed to mention it. Another letter of recommendation, issued in the same year, is sometimes associated with the mission but concerns a mendicant rather than a Birgittine and appears to have no bearing on the case.<sup>22</sup>

18 Olofsson 1962, p. 259.

19 Rydving 2016, p. 319.

20 Almquist 1865, p. 167.

21 Almquist 1865, p. 167: “[...] till ath the fatigha Lappar och andhra then landzendha urbyggjare gwdz thro och hwes theres siæl saligheth tiilydher och om saa læghlehetra till segher ath han maa ther optaga een scola för för:da lapphar schull och andhra flere godhe barn j then landzendha”. Vahl 1866, p. 87, maintains that Benedictus and Bengt were two different individuals, both from Vadstena.

22 Olofsson 1962, p. 259, interprets the letter issued for a “broder pedher petri” as in fact referring to Bengt. The letter, printed in Almquist 1865, pp. 288–289, says that “Pedher” should make contact with the Provost of Luleå to seek a position as chaplain or at any rate to avoid begging for a livelihood, “as some of his sort tend to do”, does not appear to concern either Benedictus or any other Birgittine.

Did the initiative for the northern mission take shape within the abbey, or was it merely a result of royal pressure? The question is crucial for any attempt to understand the nature of the Birgittine involvement in 1525. Previous scholarship has cast the brothers as unwilling missionaries, pressured to engage in the arduous task by the king. If this interpretation is correct, surveys of Sámi history should probably discard the mission of 1525 as an example of Birgittine interest in Sámi conversion. If, on the other hand, this interest can be substantiated by the extant sources, they might tell us something about its nature and motivations.

K.B. Westman engaged with the 1525 mission in his monograph study of the Swedish Reformation, and he interpreted the sources accordingly. He emphasized the explicit phrasing of the *Diarium*, where Bengt is said to travel at request of the king (“ex mandato regis”), and maintained that Gustav and his reform-minded secretary, Laurentius Andreae, wished to put the brothers to better use through active life outside the abbey’s enclosure. Gustav repurposed the men of the abbey as he did its silver.<sup>23</sup>

Westman was certainly right to claim that Gustav took an active interest in the cause. In fact, the king had flaunted the idea of Sámi conversion before, writing to the pope in 1523 with promises that his new regime would aid in the fight against the Turks, sway the schismatic Muscovites to further the unity of the church, and “convert the Lapland part of our Swedish realm from idolatry to Christian worship.”<sup>24</sup> As it turned out, Gustav proved no great supporter of catholic unity or crusade, but he did promote the conversion of the Sámi and he chose the Birgittines as his instrument for the task. In Westman’s narrative, quite understandably, the mission is a colourful aside in the larger drama of the Reformation, where King Gustav thrusts the Birgittines out of their enclosure and up to Norrbotten in an act of anti-monastic reformatory fervour. But even if this was a correct assumption, Gustav probably had another and more constructive aim in mind. We should assume that Gustav wished for the mission to succeed, if not for reasons of piety, then for the broader reasons that informed the attempts to colonize Norrland both before and after his reign. The Sámi would not be subjects fully—taxpaying, Godfearing and stationary—until they were fully integrated into the twin organizations of church and realm. It is likely that the king considered the strength of the Birgittines as preachers and that he wished to put this skill to use. The relevant question is if they were pressured into action, and, as such, unwilling missionaries.

Westman did not discuss what the Birgittines might have thought of participat-

23 Westman 1918, pp. 240, 357–358; Olofsson 1962, p. 259.

24 Almquist 1861, p. 130: “terramque Lapponie Nostrj Regnj Suetie partem ab idolatria ad Christianum cultum conuerti faciemus”.

ing in the northern mission, but observed that Bishop Hans Brask was critical of any such plans. As Bishop of Linköping, Brask was visitor of the abbey and informed about its affairs.<sup>25</sup> A letter to the senior brothers of the abbey from June 1524—which was written more than a year before Bengt's exit—makes clear that words had reached him of discussions among the brothers that concerned the pastoral care of the Sámi. It is unclear if the rumours concerned the specific plans for Bengt or a more general interest in the cause. At any rate, Brask felt no enthusiasm for such projects. The friars, he argued, should prioritize their duty to send members to the Birgittine foundation of Munkaliv in Norway. They should see to the interest of their order and not be distracted by secondary concerns such as the spiritual needs of the Sámi:

As for the peril of the Lapps and other strangers, your greater concern is the health of those who are lost in the house of Israel of your order, since correct charity begins with oneself.<sup>26</sup>

Brask's letter is very interesting because it suggests that he was aware of a discussion among the brothers, where arguments to help Munkaliv had been pitted against arguments to save the Sámi. Two years later (9 June 1526), only a few days after Gustav issued Bengt's travel permit, Brask returned to a similar theme in a letter, contrasting the ideal of monastic stability against calls for pastoral care abroad. In harsh words, Brask called the attention of his Birgittine addressee to the ever-present Lutheran heresy. There were priests about, he wrote, who advocated that clergy should marry and that monks should abandon monasteries for the freedom to apostolize ("propter apostolizandi libertatem").<sup>27</sup>

Westman's interpretation of Brask's concern is that the northern mission of 1525 was a Lutheran undertaking, initiated by the king and at odds with the rules and interests of the Birgittines. But the texts permit another interpretation. The fact that Gustav took an interest in the northern mission does not preclude that this interest was shared by the Birgittines. In fact, Brask tells us something crucial that suggests a more reciprocal relation between the king's requests and the brothers' compliance. King Gustav is curiously absent in Brask's letters. Brask did not exhort the Birgittines to muster

25 Brask's correspondence makes clear that he had at least one informant within, the troublesome Brother Anund, who accused his fellow brothers of compliancy with the Lutheran heresy and with the king. *HSH* vol. 18, pp. 245–247; Westman 1918, p. 240.

26 *HSH* vol. 18, pp. 239–240: "Et si de periculo Lapponum & aliorum extranorum agatur Vestra magis interest querere salutem eorum qui perierunt domus israel ordinis vestri, cum ordinata charitas incipiat a se ipso."

27 *HSH* vol. 18, p. 338: "Succrescit indies hic heresis Luterana presertim in personis quibusdam ecclesiasticis qui promouent illicita coniuga sacerdotum ac monasteriorum desolationem propter apostolizandi libertatem etcetera". Westman 1918, p. 357.

courage and withstand royal pressure. He demanded that they prioritize pastoral care within the order over the pastoral care of the Sámi, and, perhaps, considered their interest in apostolizing abroad as a dangerous tendency, tinged with the spectre of Lutheran heresy. Brask's fears, and his command that the friars drop any ideas about duties to the Sámi, indicates that he considered some Birgittines susceptible to the siren calls of the active life and of apostolizing to one's neighbour. Brask's main concern was not the eventual pressures on the abbey from the king, but the fact that some of the brothers were genuinely interested in projects of pastoral care for the Sámi.

Westman also considered another and more particular reason that must have proved an obstacle for any interested Birgittine. Did Brask's letters touch a nerve—active apostolizing, in Norrbotten or elsewhere, would violate the order's strict rule of enclosure?<sup>28</sup> The objection is a serious one, and particularly interesting in this context because it relates to the uneasy fit between the organization of the *Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris* and its aims of lay reform, as discussed above. It is true that in contrast to, for instance, the Franciscan, the Birgittine friar was meant to be stationary. Candidates for the order were reminded of the requirement to remain permanently within enclosure.<sup>29</sup> But it is also true that Birgitta had expressed the need for exceptions to the rule—for instance, in order to combat heresy or if a brother was called by a prelate and for the benefit of the church—and it is a fact that some had to travel in the interest of the order.<sup>30</sup> If Brask considered leaving the enclosure to tend to the pastoral care of the Sámi as a direct violation of the rules of the order, he did not say so explicitly. Was it possible that a mission—which served the church by combatting idolatry among the Sámi and which might have been called by a prelate other than Brask—was considered worthy of exemption from the rule? The problem should be explored but falls beyond the scope of this contribution.

To conclude this first part of the inquiry, K.B. Westman did not consider the Birgittines as genuine actors in the mission of 1525. In his account, King Gustav is the initiator, and Friar Bengt was forced north by royal will and by the winds of the Reformation. However, if we take a somewhat broader view of agency, we might think

28 Westman does not explicitly link Brask's critique of Birgittine involvement in the mission with the order's rule of enclosure, but he suggests this by way of parataxis. See Westman 1918, pp. 240, 357.

29 The rule of enclosure appears for instance in the *Liber usuum*; see Risberg 2003, p. 114.

30 Risberg 2003, p. 28; Fritz 2000, p. 100. *Rev. Extr.* 11.3–4: “[...] exire poterit [...] pro hereticis [...] confutandis. Item exire poterit, si pro vtilitate ecclesie sancte a prelati vocatus fuerit” [“He [i.e., the confessor] may also absent himself in order [...] to refute heretics, if necessary. Again, he may go outside, if he is called by the leaders of the Holy Church...” Morris & Searby 2015, p. 238]. Birgitta's exceptions explicitly concern the travels of the general confessor.

of the Birgittines as interested and active participants and Brask's reaction to the debates that took place within the abbey tells us as much. Westman's account is typical of generations of scholarship that considered the conversion of the Sámi a process that commenced in earnest only with the Reformation or later evangelical movements. Research on the integration of the Sámi into the church has rebuffed this interpretation. Depending on what one means by terms such as "conversion", many areas of Sápmi can be described as Christian before the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>31</sup> In addition, it was not just the king but also the church hierarchy who took an interest in Norrland and in converting the Sámi in the 1520s. As noted above, the first time that Gustav mentioned such plans, he did so to impress the pope. At about the same time, the Catholic Uppsala archbishops and other prelates visited the northernmost parts of their diocese, sometimes bragging about the resultant conversions among the Sámi. Olaus Magnus did so as the representative of the papal legate, Arcimboldi, in 1519.<sup>32</sup> His brother, Archbishop-elect Johannes, did the same in 1526.<sup>33</sup> In this particular year, Johannes might even have met Friar Bengt on his journey. As things developed, Johannes would soon be in exile. In a letter to Paul III, he expressed much of his concern for the Sámi, whom he could not succour, now that he had been expelled from his diocese.<sup>34</sup> As this lament makes clear, the archbishop was supposed to care for the north of his diocese. But the Birgittines had no duties of this kind. They were not travelling preachers made for missionary activities as were the mendicant friars. Was Bengt's journey something truly unique in the history of the order or was it an expression of a broader and continuous commitment? Only a study of the earlier episodes of Birgittine involvement can tell.

#### HERR TOSTE, A BIRGITTINE AGENT?

Swedish monarchs supported pastoral care and conversion among the Sámi long before the Reformation. In 1419, King Erik urged the cathedral chapter of Uppsala to permit "herre Toste" to preach, baptize, hear confession, absolve, and build chapels where the Sámi could receive instruction, "so that the Lapps will all be Christian and steadfast in their faith in God".<sup>35</sup> King Erik's letter presents a vivid image of what Toste's mission would entail, but we know nothing about its practical execution since

31 Mundal 2007, pp. 110–125.

32 Westman 1918, p. 126, n. 1.

33 Andrén 2005, p. 24; Näsström 1925 deals primarily with Johannes' visit to Jämtland.

34 Steen 1954, pp. 92–93.

35 *SD* 2697: "[...] at alle wille lappanæ matte allæ wardhe cristne oc bliwæ stathughæ i Guds tro, atj hanom stæthen oc vnnen [...]".



the letter is our only source. The mission of 1419 presents an additional difficulty with which this inquiry has to contend—we have no certain identification of Toste, and hence cannot be sure if he pertains at all to this history of the Birgittines and Norrland.

Toste was obviously a priest. Some scholars have assumed that he was a monk.<sup>36</sup> Nothing indicates that this was the case, and he was not a Birgittine since no friar of that unusual name can be identified in Vadstena. Another hypothesis about his identity has come from Sven-Erik Pernler, who suggests that King Erik brought Toste from another Scandinavian diocese, perhaps from Nidaros.<sup>37</sup> However, a parish priest of that name, from those years and in Vadstena, was first identified by Hans Hildebrand in 1884. Hildebrand wondered if this possible identification meant that the abbey was involved somehow in the mission of 1419.<sup>38</sup> A closer scrutiny of the sources strengthens his suspicion. Toste is found in a number of documents that place him in Vadstena between 1407 and 1413. Within these years, he served as an aid in transactions of the abbey, witnessing wills where the abbey was the beneficiary on no fewer than seven occasions.<sup>39</sup> In addition, a close connection between the abbey and the priest of the parish church is to be expected since St Pär and other churches in Vadstena were under the abbey's patronage.<sup>40</sup> We have grounds to identify King Erik's Toste with the Vadstena parish priest of the same name, and thus conclude that the abbey was involved in the mission of 1419.

King Erik's letter presents the general aims of Toste's mission, but not much else. Erik addressed the cathedral chapter in Uppsala, asking that it provide Toste with the necessary papers and permission for someone in the diocese who was willing to join him.<sup>41</sup> Writing to Uppsala was a natural step if the destination pertained to the archdiocese. We do not know the exact plans of the mission, but Toste would travel to somewhere where there was a Sámi population and no chapels at hand. Adolf Steen made the interesting observation that Toste had experience from previous missions—the letter states that he would administer to some who knew only little about God (“som lidit witæ aff Gudhi”), but also to some who he had already baptized (“the som

36 Nordberg 1973, p. 8. Lundmark 2016, p. 229.

37 Pernler 2005, p. 104.

38 Hildebrand 1884 (repr. 1983), p. 306 n. 2.

39 *SD* 857, 6 July 1407 (Vadstena); *SD* 1094, 5 August 1409 (Vadstena); *SD* 1131, 23 August 1409 (Vadstena); *SD* 1353, 19 October 1410 (Vadstena); *SD* 1387, 24 February 1411 (Vadstena); *SD* 1442, 28 June 1411 (Vadstena); *SD* 1776, 28 August 1413 (Vadstena). I thank Claes Gejrot and Sara Risberg at the Swedish National Archives for bringing some of these instances to my attention.

40 Fritz 2000, p. 162.

41 *SD* 2697.

han hauer förræ cristnet"). Steen concluded that this meant that Toste had worked among the Sámi, but only in southernly parts of the far north territories.<sup>42</sup> Arguably, the wording is more open ended, suggesting simply that wherever Toste would go in 1419, he had been before.

Who took the initiative for Toste's mission? As in the case of the journey of Friar Bengt in 1525, we have a letter that explicates the support of the king. Erik would have had the same general reasons as any king—pious or practical—to support the conversion of the Sámi. An old idea, presented in a dissertation defended by the future archbishop Andreas Swebilius in 1721, suggests that Pope Martin V had spurred the king to act.<sup>43</sup> Pernler, on the other hand, suggests that Erik acted with a more particular aim in mind: he wished to fulfil the intentions of his adoptive mother, Queen Margareta, who had supported appeals for a Norrland mission a few decades earlier, as discussed below.<sup>44</sup>

To conclude this discussion about the mission of 1419 and hence the second part of this inquiry, we can apply what we learned from its 1525 counterpart. Our one source for this event connects Toste and his journey with the interests of the king, but not in any explicit way with Vadstena. However, the better-documented case of Bengt might teach us to not judge by false dichotomies—the fact that King Erik gave his support to the mission in 1419 does not preclude an active interest from Vadstena. Furthermore, it might also teach us to look carefully for less obvious byways of the abbey's influence. If the missionary of King Erik's letter is identical to the Vadstena parish priest of that unusual name, we must remember that the village church was under its patronage and that the abbey probably had a great deal to say about whether or not he could leave and travel to Norrbotten. If he did, he did so with the abbey's blessing.

Another reason to think that the Birgittines were involved in the mission of 1419 pertains to Pernler's suggestion that Erik should not be considered its instigator, but the continuator of a project cherished by his adoptive mother, the queen. As discussed in the next section of this article, Queen Margareta had supported appeals already made by a Sámi woman in 1389. In 1414 or earlier, that same woman was back in Vadstena and gaining support for her cause. In these years, King Erik was no stranger to the abbey. He arrived there devoutly on his bare feet in 1413 and promised on that occasion that he would complete the building of a Birgittine monastery that his adoptive mother had begun.<sup>45</sup> If fulfilling Margareta's Birgittine building plans was on his Vadstena

42 Steen 1954, p. 92.

43 Swebilius 1721, pp. 6–7. Swebilius refers to Johannes Messenius.

44 Pernler 2005, p. 104.

45 *DV* 221.

agenda, why not the execution of her plans for Norrland? For all we know, the Sámi zealot who inspired the queen might have been there to remind him. As for Toste, who appears to be the likely agent to execute these plans, records indicate that he was still in Vadstena in 1413. By 1419, he had become an experienced missionary to the Sámi. A possible scenario is that Toste left with the abbey's blessing for a first mission sometime after 1414, gaining experience for the later enterprise that we have on record.

#### MARGARETA, SÁMI AND BIRGITTINE MYSTIC OF APOSTOLATE?

The most notable of the medieval accounts of mission among the Sámi concern Margareta, a Sámi woman who sought support for a northern mission from the late 1380s to 1414. By 1389, her persistent appeals among Swedish prelates resulted in the support of her royal namesake, Queen Margareta, ruler of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. This was no doubt an impressive achievement for a woman of low birth, sprung from the northern peripheries of church and realm, but it could not have come about without the support of a network of other actors. Why did Swedish prelates—and the ruler of the realm—pay attention and contribute to Margareta's project of mission and church reform? This is an important question in the history of pastoral care and conversion in Norrland, and the answer has much to do with the Birgittines. Margareta's case provides a snapshot of an influential Birgittine network inspired by a spirit of reform.

The notion that Margareta's appeals for a northern mission took shape under Birgittine influence is not new. In 1929, Karl B. Wiklund proposed that Margareta's zeal for the conversion of the Sámi might have been inspired by a Birgittine movement of revival, but he did not substantiate this claim with references to the sources.<sup>46</sup> Yngve Brilioth maintained that the queen's support of the mission in 1389 was an attempt to gain the trust among the Swedish clergy from her position of strength in influential Vadstena.<sup>47</sup> Rydving, who has attributed a significant role for the Birgittines in the history of Sámi conversion, does not specify how they were involved, but suggests that the sources should be analysed in their connection to Birgitta and Vadstena.<sup>48</sup>

My previous contribution to the case observed that the Swedish clerical elite identified Margareta's religious idiom and her appeals for mission with those of Birgitta and other medieval women mystics who strove to reform the church. I argued that these clerics assessed her case in accordance with the particular discourse that had developed

46 Wiklund 1929, p. 72.

47 Brilioth 1925, pp. 161, 257.

48 Rydving 2016, p. 319.

to discern bad spirits from good, the *discretio spirituum*. Contemporaries interpreted Margareta as a specific case of a wider phenomenon.<sup>49</sup> While some of these observations will be recapitulated below, questions that specifically relate to the Birgittines must come to the fore. Did members of the order actively engage in support of Margareta? Which other actors were involved and how did they relate to the Birgittines? To what extent do the sources for this episode concern ideals and symbols associated with Birgitta and her order?

Five documents written between 1388 and 1414 testify to Margareta's efforts to reform the church in Norrland. They are letters of recommendation written on her behalf by members of the Scandinavian clerical and secular elite. Everything we know about Margareta and her appeals is mediated through these writers. The problem is typical in scholarship on women mystics, the experiences and agendas of whom generally were mediated by male clergy. A similar problem arises in studies of Sámi history, where most sources come from members of the majority society such as representatives of church and state.<sup>50</sup> We must be cautious using these letters as sources to the personal aims and outlook of Margareta, but we know for certain what they tell us about how Swedish clergymen argued for her cause.<sup>51</sup>

We know of at least one Birgittine who took an interest in the case, and he was the scribe who ensured that the letters survive. All letters are handed down through one and the same codex, a book of copies compiled at Vadstena Abbey.<sup>52</sup> They are preserved because they reached the abbey and were considered worthwhile for this institution to preserve. Hence, it is no surprise that most of them were written by authors who were in frequent contact and on good terms with the abbey, and that some refer to Birgitta and her particular religious idiom. This history of transmission can make us overestimate the importance of Birgittine involvement, but it does make clear that the abbey took an interest.

Among the letters, the oldest is probably the one written by Filip Petersson, a Franciscan in Stockholm. Though his addressee is anonymous, it has been suggested that Filip wrote to a canon in Uppsala, and Brilioth held that the letter should be dated to 22 April 1388 or 1389.<sup>53</sup> In 1390, Filip wrote another letter, preserved in the same

49 Tjällén 2018.

50 The problem is discussed in the various contributions in Mooney 1999 and in Lindmark & Sundström 2016, p. 26.

51 It is difficult to use the letters of recommendation if we aim to compile the "Sámi church history", about "Sámi Christianity from a Sámi perspective and with Sámi actors" that, for instance, Håkan Rydving has called for. See Rydving 2016, p. 316.

52 RA, MS A 20.

53 Brilioth 1925, p. 256.

codex but addressed instead to Vadstena Abbey and to the Bishop of Linköping. The content of this second letter has no immediate bearing on Margareta, but testifies to Filip's contacts with the abbey and to his personal investment in Birgittine mysticism. Apart from conventional instructions about jubilee year penance and rants about lost books, Filip comments on Birgitta's Revelations and on a prophetic utterance of her associate, Prior Petrus. In *Rev.* VIII.18:7–20, Birgitta spoke of the Lord's hunter who blows his bugle in the forest and keeps the beasts away from the sheep. Filip claimed that this revelation referred to him and his calling as a preacher. And Prior Petrus had, upon his death bed, mentioned a certain brother who should be obeyed. Filip maintained that this referred to him.<sup>54</sup>

It is easy to discard Filip's claims for himself as a curiosity, but they are important in this context because they articulate a manner of thinking where God works mysteriously through agents of his choosing. In this same vein, Filip argued that Margareta might be an instrument of God who should not be neglected:

Since God makes wonders through the weaker sex, as is apparent in the case of blessed Birgitta and other holy women, the carrier of this letter—Margareta, who through her many wanderings and labours a long time has suffered for the conversion of the infidels among the Laplanders—should not be spurned but heard with patience. Even though she might accomplish little maybe she is used by God as a tool so that those who could but do not care of the souls will realize that they are slothful.<sup>55</sup>

The obvious target of Filip's reproach was the Archbishop of Uppsala. Filip asks his recipient—perhaps a canon at the cathedral—that Margareta should be brought before the archbishop, and that he should exhort him to carry out his duties in the parts of Christendom near the Sámi. The archbishop should exercise his office and reform Christian customs (“reformat mores christianos”). The aim is to reform clergy and laity, but when the clergy have been rectified and priests sent to better inform Christian people, those who are pagans can be baptized one by one.<sup>56</sup>

Filip addressed a matter that concerned primarily the Archbishop of Uppsala. But

54 RA, MS A 20, fol. 205r–v. For comments on the content, see *SDHK* 13630.

55 *HSH* vol. 29, pp. 21–22: “Quum etiam deus in fragili sexu mirabilia operatur sicut patet in beata byrgitta et aliis sanctis mulieribus. Ideo latrrix presentis margareta que in multis discursibus et vexacionibus longo iam tempore afflixerat pro conversione infidelium signanter lapponum non est contempnenda sed pacienter audienda, licet enim parum proficit tamen forte deus ipsa tanquam intrumento utitur ut accidiosius arguendos se cognoscant qui possent prodesse animabus et non curant.” See Tjällén 2018, pp. 31, 41–42.

56 *HSH* vol. 29, pp. 21–22. Brilioth discusses the identity of the recipient of the letter (1925, p. 256).

his interest took shape within a Birgittine context. It was a context of social and professional networks; he corresponded and traded books on friendly terms with the abbey. And it was a context of a particular brand of spirituality; Filip strengthened his personal authority on the words of Birgitta and he legitimized Margareta by reminding Uppsala that God used women like them as his instruments of church reform.

Filip probably wrote to Uppsala and sent Margareta the same way. She appeared, and the canons and prelates were somewhat wary of their visitor. A letter sent by the dean, Henrik Henechini, explained that she claimed to have divinely inspired visions and admonitions (“sibi aliquas occultas visiones et admoniciones facta asserit”) and asked the anonymous addressee to determine whether these were genuine. The question was: should she be praised or silenced? The letter made clear that the problem involved a trial of the spirit that possessed Margareta—a *discrecio et probacio spirituum*—and Henrik acknowledged that this was a difficult task, especially so for those who were constantly occupied with administrative duties and had little experience in such matters. This is a curious statement. Perhaps Henrik and other members of the chapter wished to get rid of the case, burying it in a lengthy inquiry. At any rate, he asked the recipient to please write back and declare if Margareta’s visions were to be considered edification, sent forth from the good spirit, or illusions sent from the bad.<sup>57</sup>

Brilioth suggested that Henrik addressed another cathedral chapter, and Liedgren implied that Henrik addressed either the Bishop of Linköping or bishops assembled at a provincial synod.<sup>58</sup> Arguably, the recipient was Vadstena.<sup>59</sup> Henrik wrote to ask for an informed opinion from men who were familiar with the practice of discerning between the good spirit and the bad. This practice had developed to assess the claims of inspired women, and Birgitta had already been the object of such discretionary scrutiny in her lifetime.<sup>60</sup> The edited accounts of Birgitta’s revelations showcase this preoccupation with discerning their true nature. For instance, in the narrative of Birgitta’s original calling, God speaks from the clouds, which makes her fear that she is the victim of a dangerous illusion. God, however, stops Birgitta from running away and hiding, and commands that she confides in her confessor, Mathias, “who is knowledgeable in discerning between the two spirits” (“qui expertus est duorum spirituum

57 RA, MS A 20, fol. 98r; *HSH* 29, pp. 20–21. Brilioth 1925, p. 255, suggests that it should be dated 1 September 1388; cf. Liedgren 1985–1987, p. 146.

58 Brilioth 1925, 254; Liedgren 1985–1987, p. 146. If the letter addressed the synod, it comes from as late as 1412.

59 The editors of *SDHK* (the letter is numbered 13572) suggest that Vadstena was the recipient.

60 It was alleged that Birgitta’s revelations at an early stage had been handed over, scrutinized, and found to proceed “from the good spirit of truth and light” by a committee of the Archbishop of Uppsala and other bishops and monks. See Undhagen 1978, pp. 47–48.

discrecionem”).<sup>61</sup> The (male) clerical expertise would vouch for the truth of the revelation and put worries to rest. In addition to such exemplary narratives, the editions include abstract treatments of *discrecio spirituum*. Alfonso of Jaen insisted that it was wrong to accept or reject claims of divinely inspired visions without the appropriate investigation and prefaced the revelations with a veritable manual in the practice of how to assess the person and content of the visions.<sup>62</sup>

Henrik Henechini was the Dean of Uppsala Cathedral, the institution responsible for pastoral care in Norrland. But the charismatic appeals from Margareta and her supporters challenged this bureaucratic authority in a manner that must have seemed familiar to any cleric at the time. In the latter 1380s, Birgitta's canonization was well under way, and among Swedish churchmen the appearance of a lay woman mystic who took the clerical authorities to task was immediately recognizable. The parallel between Margareta and Birgitta could inspire enthusiasm, as it did with Filip Peterson. But it could also raise fears. These women were deemed suspicious since the signs of divine possession were the same as those of demonic possession, which made it crucial to decide in whose name they were actually speaking,<sup>63</sup> but also because they challenged the roles of leadership in the church on account of their visions.<sup>64</sup>

A more enthusiastic recommendation of Margareta and her cause reached the abbey from Bishop Tord of Strängnäs, whose contacts with Vadstena can be followed through the entries in the *Diarium*.<sup>65</sup> Tord's letter brings the *discrecio spirituum* criteria of Alfonso of Jaen to mind.<sup>66</sup> It was clear, he argued, that Margareta was led by the good spirit, since she worked for God's law and since she appealed for a cause that was holy as well as reasonable (“verum quia mulier predicta zelum habens bonum legis dei bono sicuti credimus ducata spiritu et rem sanctam et rationabilem expostulat”).<sup>67</sup> Tord's effusive recommendation of Margareta also mirrors Birgitta's particular spiritual ideal, the Blessed Virgin Mary, considered as a symbol of simplicity, poverty and willingness to suffer.<sup>68</sup> According to Tord, Margareta was a simple, poor, and uneducated woman (“simplex pauper et rudis”) who did not seek glory or pleasure for herself but only for God (“delicias vel honores non appetens sed ad ea sollumodo quae ad dei

61 Collijn 1924–1931, p. 81.

62 Jönsson 2002; Tjällén 2018, pp. 36–39.

63 Caciola 2003.

64 Anderson 2011, pp. 159–224; Caciola 2003, pp. 274–314. Authors such as Henrik of Langestein, Pierre d'Ailly, and Jean Gerson wrote on the topic.

65 *DV* 41:4, 49:3, 103:3, 110:2, 110:5.

66 Tjällén 2018, pp. 37–38, 43–44.

67 RA, MS A 20, fol. 96v.

68 Borgehammar 1998, pp. 43–47.



sunt animum dirigens"). Tord urged the brothers to receive her with patience and devotion, and suggested that when the queen next visited their monastery, they should tell the queen to enjoin the prelates of Uppsala and Åbo, as well as her bailiffs, with the task of the northern mission. According to Tord, preachers could be sent from these dioceses since they were not far from where the pagans lived. He reckoned God's plan (*mysterio*) was manifest in the appearance of this simple woman who stirred princes and prelates to action. The son of God had wished to make his name and the true faith known to the people so that they might be saved in the latter days ("novissimis temporibus").<sup>69</sup>

Tord outlined a project of sending preachers from Uppsala and Turku (the borders of the two dioceses met north of the Gulf of Bothnia). But Vadstena's support was necessary, so he argued according to the discursive criteria and spiritual ideal that was familiar and shared at the abbey. The abbey, he thought, had the ear of the queen, and the final letter in this series—from Queen Margareta Valdemarsdotter and the Archbishop of Lund, 6 August 1389—proved him right, since it carried out what he intended. Margareta is mentioned in the grand letter as a woman from the Uppsala diocese ("Mulier Vpsalensis dyocesis") who has provided information about the state of things in the north. The *populo lappenorum* are the explicit addressees and most of the content is an exhortation to abandon idolatry. But it is hard to dismiss the impression that it was the archbishop and the bailiff at Korsholm (which included the northernmost parts on both sides of the Gulf of Bothnia), who were the real recipients. The queen exhorted them to support the mission and said that she would remember their troubles before the pope.<sup>70</sup>

Bishop Tord had asked the Birgittines to plead with the queen and they must have done so. She was willing to help for political reasons but perhaps also for religious reasons of her own. She controlled the Swedish realm after the defeat of Albrecht at Åsle/Falköping in February 1389, and Brilioth considered her support for the northern mission a few months later as a stratagem for securing good relations with the Swedish higher clergy (who feared being replaced with Danes), using influential Vadstena as a bridgehead. Brilioth acknowledged that the queen might have had less pragmatic motives; her pious visitor perhaps served as a reminder of the duty of a Christian monarch to convert her heathen subjects.<sup>71</sup> As for her religious motivations, she might have

69 RA, MS A 20, fol. 96v.

70 RA, MS A 20, fol. 96r–v.

71 Brilioth 1925, pp. 161–163; Etting 2004, p. 116.

shared some of the mystical idiom of her Sámi namesake and had visions of her own.<sup>72</sup>

A last word of Margareta comes from decades after the grand letter from the queen. Abbott Sten—who made a Birgittine reform of the Norwegian monastery of Munkeliv—had met Margareta, probably in Vadstena because he wrote on behalf of her cause from there to Uppsala in 1414. He reminded the archbishop of the commission to the apostles to go, teach, and baptize all peoples (“ite, docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos”), and then expounded on the personal qualities of the woman who for so long had suffered in her labours of spreading the faith among the Sámi, on an endless wandering with tears and prayers to move kings and queens and bishops.<sup>73</sup>

To conclude this third section of the inquiry, it is important to note that as far as we can tell it was a lay and Sámi woman, Margareta, who took the initiative to improve pastoral care in Norrland and further conversion among the Sámi. It is equally important to take note of the institutional and the cultural contexts that furthered her cause and may thus have served to motivate it.

Margareta obviously found a receptive audience for her appeals among the Birgittines. Vadstena Abbey kept a record on the case. The friars may have been directly involved in assessing the legitimacy her visions, and they probably won over the queen for Margareta's cause. But the file also exhibits the actions of a wider circle of their supporters: Abbot Sten, Bishop Tord, and Friar Filip. Their letters of support explicitly refer to Birgitta and adopt the particular discourse associated with her and other women mystics. Filip and Tord considered Margareta a mystic harbinger of church reform, and Tord was obviously familiar with the discourse of *discrecio spirituum* that had legitimized Birgitta. It is noteworthy that these supporters of Sámi conversion considered it as part of a wider aim of reform, which they thought could be accomplished by preaching and other forms of pastoral care, and by the contribution of someone who followed the right example. Stephan Borgehammar has called Birgitta “an unrelenting messenger of reform”, and emphasized that Birgitta considered herself a follower of the model set by the Virgin Mary, who stood for wisdom expressed as simplicity and humility, and a willingness to be poor and suffer for Christ.<sup>74</sup> Margareta—described as “simplex, pauper et rudis” [“simple, poor and uneducated”] and acclaimed by all for her sufferings—was a perfect product of this Birgittine reform, and an ideal lay agent to widen the Birgittine circles, though we cannot rule out that she was also inspired

72 *DV* 120 reports that the queen, on a visit to the abbey in 1403, had told the brothers how a woman in a grey habit (Birgitta) had intervened on the behalf of a woman in grave spiritual peril (Margareta), telling her to “care for the brothers in Vadstena and you shall be saved from these perils”.

73 *SD* 1927 (dated 7 March 1414).

74 Borgehammar 1998, pp. 26, 43–47.

by the more apostolic or missionary mysticism, contemplative and yet devoted to the service of one's neighbour, that characterized some women mystics on the continent.<sup>75</sup>

#### BIRGITTINE SALMON FISHING IN NORRBOTTEN

The case of Margareta and the enthusiasm that she elicited among the Birgittines and their circle is a reminder of the reforming spirituality that engaged sympathizers in projects of northern pastoral care and conversion. However, we know that other members of the late medieval clerical and secular elites also took an interest in Norrbotten for reasons of profit; salmon fishing seemed particularly lucrative. Vadstena Abbey was one of Sweden's great landholders and it would be remiss not to ask if there were economic reasons behind the Norrland enterprise of the Birgittines.

From the outset, it seems unlikely that Vadstena would have engaged in business ventures so far north. In his classic study of its economy, Lars-Arne Norborg concluded that the abbey strove to centralize its property to keep it within a manageable distance. Norborg charts property donations according to their location and the findings bear out his general conclusion: the concentration of Vadstena estates was found in Östergötland. However, since the property came as donations outliers might appear, and some were present in the abbey's portfolio. In fact, from 1380 to 1409, the Birgittines held property in Piteå parish, Norrbotten.<sup>76</sup>

The Norrbotten donations came from Sten Stensson (Bielke), knight and royal councillor ("riksråd"), who had inherited the property from his maternal grandfather Nils Abjörnsson (Sparre), a man who apparently partook in the colonization initiatives in the first half of the 14th century. In 1380, Sten donated a farm to the abbey. Another donation came in 1386 on the death of his wife Katarina Lafrensdotter (Örnsparre), who was a great-granddaughter of Birgitta. Yet another came when Sten entered the abbey as a lay brother in 1395, when he, among other estates, donated all his property in the parish of Piteå. The abbey would keep these estates in Norrbotten until 1409, when they were exchanged for property closer to home.<sup>77</sup> As indicated by the document from this exchange, the Piteå holdings included salmon fishing ("laxa fiskerino").<sup>78</sup>

Married to a relative of the foundress, and later in life a lay brother, Sten was as

75 Despres 1996, pp. 141–144.

76 Norborg 1958, pp. 40–44, 74.

77 Norborg 1958, p. 76. Bygdén 1921, pp. 10–19.

78 *SDHK* 17239.

much a Birgittine as any layman could hope to be.<sup>79</sup> As a great landholder, he made many donations and not all of them went to the abbey. Interestingly, his generosity also favoured Vadstena's parish church, with an altar where two masses should be read weekly by a priest appointed by the abbey. Incidentally, this was the church where Toste, the parish priest and likely candidate for the northern mission of 1419, was active.<sup>80</sup>

To conclude this coda, the fourth and final section of the inquiry, it is interesting to note that Vadstena Abbey acquired property in Norrbotten about the time when it engaged in the appeals of Margareta for a strengthened ecclesiastical presence in that part of the country. The donor of these estates, Sten Stensson, was also benefactor of the parish church under patronage of the abbey, where the likely missionary Toste was priest. These facts are intriguing concurrences but not hard evidence that the abbey engaged in northern pastoral care to protect their propriety interests. It is interesting, however, to consider that, for a few decades around 1400, the Birgittines had both pastoral and financial interests in Norrland.

### CONCLUSIONS

Surveys of Sámi history have long maintained that the Birgittines took a continuous interest in the conversion of Sápmi. That view has been based on no more than three historical examples and never put to a methodical scrutiny that includes all available sources, nor engages with the relevant wider scholarship that places a clear focus on the Birgittines. This contribution examines the source material anew, including sources that have not been featured in the previous critical discussion, for what it tells us about Birgitta's order and its impact on late medieval enterprises of church reform and its mission in Norrland.

In 1525, a Birgittine friar left the abbey to engage in the work of conversion in Norrland. However, scholars looking more closely at the material have considered this an initiative of the king and a result of the budding Reformation, casting the Birgittines as unwilling missionaries. This inquiry, in contrast, concludes that even though King Gustav took an active part in the mission project, the sources suggest that some of the friars took an interest in Sámi conversion. Another mission, on record from 1419, has been problematic to include as an episode in a history of Birgittine involvement in

79 According to the *DV* 85:2 and 416, Sten—"qui fuerat magnus dominus et miles in seculo" ["had been a great lord and soldier in his time"]—became a lay brother in 1395 and died at the abbey in 1431.

80 *SDHK* 14388; Fritz 2000, p. 162.

northern pastoral care and conversion since the sources make no explicit reference to the order. However, an attempt to identify the missionary who is named in the sources must conclude that he was one and the same as a priest who was active in the Vadstena parish church and an associate of the abbey. We can assume that he would not have left his post and travelled north without the abbey's blessing. A better-known case, with more numerous sources, concerns the visionary Sámi woman Margareta and her appeals to the clerical and secular elites for a more active church in the northernmost parts of the Uppsala diocese, from the late 1380s to 1414. While it is most likely that Margareta was the instigator of these appeals, the sources exhibit a number of ways in which the Birgittines and their associates contributed. At least in the eyes of clerical informants, Margareta exhibited Birgittine spiritual ideals. The sources describe her as a sufferer for her cause, a woman "simplex, humilis et pauper". Her clerical sympathizers considered the ability of her person and her appeals to rouse the church hierarchy for the cause of Christian reform as parallel to Birgitta, and they applied the criteria from the so-called *discrecio spirituum*, used to assess women mystics of her kind, when evaluating her character and intentions. The letters of these sympathizers help us glean a network of Birgittine associates—including a friar, a bishop, and an abbot—well versed in the discourses of the order, but they also evince the active contributions of the Vadstena brethren, for instance, in winning the support of Queen Margareta Valdemarsdotter for Margareta's cause.

Vadstena Abbey kept a record of the case of Margareta. What they intended with this dossier on a case of extraordinary lay piety and appeal for church reform, pastoral care, and conversion in Norrbotten is not entirely clear. It is noteworthy, however, that simultaneous with its interest in the case of Margareta, the abbey acquired property in Norrbotten. For a few decades, the Birgittines had pastoral as well as economic interests in the northernmost parts of the Uppsala province.

A final finding of this contribution suggests that the Birgittines, or rather their foundress, was familiar with and interested in the developments in Norrbotten as early as the 1340s, as indicated by one of her revelations. Like many of the other texts discussed in this inquiry, this revelation exhorts the Archbishop of Uppsala to engage more actively, and probably in the northern peripheries of his diocese. The revelation has not been featured in the surveys of Sámi history, and quite understandably, since Birgitta does not mention the Sámi specifically. However, several sources discussed above consider organizational and spiritual reform of the church and laity, intensified pastoral care, and conversion of those among the Sámi who were still pagans as parts of one and the same enterprise. For instance, Friar Filip argued in the 1380s that the archbishop should carry out his visitations and rectification of the clergy in Christian areas where some Sámi were found, and hoped that once the general work of reform among

those already baptized was done, remaining heathens would be converted one by one. Clearly, all Sámi were not considered heathen though; the most striking example of course is the Sámi devout Margareta, but our sources suggest that in 1419, King Erik's missionary would visit some Sámi who were already Christian and others who knew little of God. Finally, in 1525, King Gustav did not intend Friar Bengt from Vadstena to provide exclusively for the Sámi, but for all inhabitants in that part of the country. These results bear out scholarship that suggestively claims that Sámi integration into the church was already well underway in some parts in the Later Middle Ages.

Birgitta intended her order to contribute to the spiritual reform of the laity as much as the clergy. Stephan Borgehammar has asked just how Birgitta intended her monastic order to accomplish lay reform and identified some of the means and symbols put to use in the architectural and liturgical abbey space, where communication with the laity usually took place. The apostolizing enterprises discussed in this inquiry were essentially attempts to reform or convert the laity, but they took place in areas remote from the abbey and hence exemplify very different paths of Birgittine agency. With the exception of Friar Bengt and his journey in 1525, the Birgittines engaged in the projects of pastoral care and conversion primarily by putting pressure on the formal authority tasked with this responsibility, Uppsala, and by stoking the reforming enthusiasm among their lay and clerical network of agents.

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# The Authors

ROGER ANDERSSON is Professor of Scandinavian languages at Stockholm University. He has mostly worked on medieval literature, with a particular focus on religious texts and sermons. He is the general editor of the critical edition of the Old Swedish version of the Revelations of St Birgitta and was awarded the Birgitta Prize in 2019.

DAVID CARRILLO-RANGEL is a Ph.D. student at the University of Bergen and has published various articles on medieval spirituality, comparative literature, and queer studies. In his forthcoming dissertation, *Performing Visions. Queer Visionary Discourses, Materiality and Authority in Birgitta of Sweden's Autotheories*, he applies queer theory to manuscript studies.

KATARINA HALLQVIST is a Ph.D. student in Practical Theology at Lund University. She studies how passion devotion in the Vadstena Abbey in the Middle Ages is expressed in sermons, liturgy, devotional literature, prayers, and art. She also works as an organist.

ANN M. HUTCHISON is a Fellow and Academic Dean Emerita of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies in Toronto, Canada. Her research on literacy of medieval women led her to St Birgitta of Sweden and her Order, especially the English house, Syon Abbey, on which she has published numerous articles and edited a monograph.

ANNA-STINA HÄGGLUND was awarded her Ph.D. in Nordic History at Åbo Akademi University, Turku, in 2022. Her research interests concern Birgittine monasteries in the Baltic Sea region and their interaction with the surrounding

societies. She is also a member of the research project *Lived Religion in Medieval Finland* at the University of Tampere (2021–2024).

EINAT KLAFTER, Tel Aviv University, is the co-founder of the *Mysticism & Lived Experience Network* (M&LEN). She has written and published on Margery Kempe and Birgitta of Sweden. Her research interests focus on the construction of authority, how lived experience impacts the conceptualization of the divine, popular devotional practices, female-oriented pilgrimage, and questions of gender and authorship in late medieval mystical texts.

KARIN LAGERGREN is Associate Professor in Musicology at Linnaeus University at Växjö, Sweden, and Research Associate at the Alamire Foundation, Belgium. She has carried out extensive research on the chant tradition and liturgy of the Birgittine Order, as well as numerous studies on the chant tradition in medieval Sweden.

LAURA SAETVEIT MILES is Professor of British Literature at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of Bergen, Norway. She publishes on visionary and devotional literature, the Birgittines and Carthusians in England, women's literary culture, and feminist and queer approaches to the Middle Ages. Her current project explores Birgitta's influence on medieval England.

EVA LINDQVIST SANDGREN is Professor in Art History at Uppsala University and a specialist in medieval book illumination. Her other research interests are medieval textiles and Vadstena Abbey. A recently accomplished interdisciplinary project was creating a digital 3D model of the Vadstena Abbey church in 1470, with auralizations of its liturgy.

BIÖRN TJÄLLÉN is Associate Professor in History at Mid Sweden University, Sundsvall. His research interests cover medieval political thought, Church history, and historiography. He is currently engaged in a project on the treatment of matters of government in late medieval moral theology and pastoral care.