

Saint Bride AND HER BOOK

BIRGITTA OF SWEDEN'S *REVELATIONS*



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JULIA BOLTON HOLLOWAY

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Birgitta of Sweden's *Revelations*

**Translated from Middle English
with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay**

Julia Bolton Holloway

D.S. BREWER

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Queen Joan of Naples, Catherine and Birgitta of Sweden,
Madonna Lapa Acciaiuoli Buondelmonte.
Andrea da Firenze, *Via Veritatis*, Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria
Novella, Florence, 1366-67. Fratelli Alinari

In Memory of Fioretta Mazzei

Preface



Saint Birgitta's Life, her *vita*, and her Book, the *Revelations*, exist in countless documents and manuscripts, in many languages. In this book's chronology, map, and texts, we see her in time and space, attaining authority and influence. St. Birgitta wrote of herself as Christ's bride, his *sponsa*. Medieval English writers therefore often called her 'Saint Bride', as well as 'Byrgitt' or, more rarely, 'Bridget', among these Margery Kempe using the punning form of her name, 'Saint Bride'.

During her lifetime Bride was already famous. The Frontispiece to this book shows Queen Joan of Naples, with golden hair and golden crown, Catherine of Sweden, dressed simply in coif and pilgrim garb, her mother, Birgitta of Sweden, humbly kneeling in the background as a widow, while in the foreground is their friend Lapa Acciaiuoli Buondelmonte. These four women appear in a Florentine fresco painted in 1366-1368 because they were together in Naples, all of them associated with Nicholas Acciaiuolo, who built La Certosa in Florence and who died in 1366. Their story, their sacred and sometimes profane conversation, will unfold in the pages of this book.

Because Birgitta and her daughter Catherine, following their deaths, were considered for canonization as saints within their own century, careful written accounts were compiled about both women. Paradoxically, when a saint is canonized by the Church, that individual, though dead, undergoes a *processus*, a trial, much in the same manner as does a living person about to be convicted or acquitted of a crime. The canonization process likewise consists of the telling of tales by witnesses; indeed the *Acta et Processus*, the 'Deeds and Trial', becomes a collection of biographical stories, out of sequence, but compellingly narrated, as authenticating anecdotes and examples of sanctity, as if they were *The Ring and the Book* in reverse. These powerful and persuasive documents survive. A *vita* was also created, both for the canonization and using these canonization documents.

The documents concerning the life of Saint Bride largely survive because Birgitta herself had already written books and letters setting forth her visions from Christ, the Virgin, and Saints to Popes, Emperors, and Kings. These books included her eight-volume *Revelations*, her *Rule* for her Order of the Holy Saviour and Saint Birgitta, her *Sermo Angelicus*, the 'Word of the Angel', dictated to her by an angel, and the *Cantus Sororum*, the 'Sisters' Songs', giving the Offices for her nuns and monks to sing. This book in your

hands attempts to present, edit, and translate some of these writings.

Besides such texts are her wonder-working relics, parts of her body, and also her garments and possessions, such as her patchwork quilt of a mantle cobbled together from a wornout dress. These objects are treasured in the double monasteries founded as daughter houses throughout Europe from her mother house, the Abbey in Vadstena, Sweden, in the same places as were her manuscripts to be found. It is possible to patch together again the 'Book of Saint Bride', as if it were a cloak fashioned from a robe, through using her own words from the autobiographical *Revelations*, and from others' accounts of her in the trial for canonization. It was, indeed, in that manner that books by her and about her were written in the Middle Ages. We also even have an example of her own writing, preserved in Stockholm, where she has penned Swedish words upon Italian paper, sewing two sheets together in order not to waste them.

This volume consists of an introduction giving the life—the *vita*—of Saint Birgitta from a Latin document preserved in Florence, Italy, but written out in Vadstena, Sweden, by Johannes Johannis of Kalmar, in 1397, soon after her canonization. Then the text of Princeton University's Garrett Collection 146 Manuscript of her *Revelations* follows. I chose to translate this particular version of the extant *Revelations* because it stresses the prophetic visionary quality of her writings, because it presents her *Revelations* in an already appropriately edited medieval version, because its second part is focused on women, and because it is today in America. The manuscript is likely written out by two English Brigittine monastics, one, perhaps, male, the other possibly a nun, who translate and digest into Middle English Saint Birgitta's far lengthier eight-volume work recorded in Latin by male priests, the Swedish Master Mathias, the two Peter Olavis, of Alvastra and of Skenninge, and the Spanish Alfonso of Jaen, her appointed confessors. Last in the volume is given an interpretative essay discussing Bride's use of textuality as a woman in order to gain access to authority and to influence the rulers of Christendom, in the manner of the Sibyls and the Prophets, and the adoption of that textuality by other women both within and outside her monastic communities. Throughout, the texts generated by Bride's community are themselves presented as evidence for this book's arguments. The footnotes to the Text are for the use of undergraduate readers; but the endnotes to the Introduction and the Interpretative Essay document the research carried out in Sweden, Italy, Germany and England amongst manuscripts and books usually not in English and are for scholars in the field (it is suggested that the undergraduate student not read these); the bibliography, as Suggestions for Further Reading, lists those works about Birgitta of Sweden, studies on women, monasticism and pilgrimage related to this book, the Brigittine presence in England, and works on Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, whom Birgitta of Sweden

influenced, that would be accessible and useful to undergraduate students.

In the translation and in the essays, Birgitta is either called such or given the form 'Bride', as she is called in some Middle English manuscripts, such as British Library MS Claudius BI, MS Julius FII, and the *Book of Margery Kempe*, MS Additional 61,823 in obvious reference to Christ speaking of her as his *sponsa*, his Bride. In the Princeton, Garrett 145, manuscript translated here she is 'seynte Byrgitte' or 'saynt Birgytt', that spelling being more correct and true to the Swedish form of her name. This book avoids the Irish form, 'Bridget', italianized as 'Brigida'. The Garrett manuscript text uses 'ghost', not 'Spirit', 'maker', not 'Creator', 'ayan-byer' ('again-buyer'), not 'Redeemer', 'righteousness', not 'Justice', and so forth, forms of words which are closer to their original meaning in English but for which today's customary usage is in alienating Latin. Medieval texts used little capitalization in connection with God. Some, but not all, of the modern printing conventions in this area are adopted, generally nouns only being capitalized. Roman and arabic numbers in square brackets following the manuscript's rubrics (parts emphasized by being written in red, here in bold), refer to book and chapter divisions in *Revelationes Sanctae Brigittae* (Rome: Grignani, 1628). It is recommended that the student reading the text visualize the manuscript with its rubrication. A facsimile edition for scholarly use is greatly needed of the fine Lübeck 1492 *editio princeps*, or first edition, including its engravings made from the illuminated manuscript brought by the monks from Vadstena.

One section of this Middle English manuscript, on the 'Doom of Kings', was previously translated into Modern English by Patrick O'Moore and published in 1982 in an edition limited to 40 copies. A translation of *Revelations V and VII* and other materials from the Latin texts, in *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Writings*, was edited by Marguerite Tjader Harris, Albert Ryle Kezel, and Tore Nyberg, and published by the Paulist Press in 1990. Several books have been written in English about Saint Birgitta of Sweden. But there is still a great need to position Birgitta in the gallery of portraits of major women writers. She had been placed in the canon of saints in 1391, the Emperor Charles of Bohemia, Chaucer's Queen Anne of Bohemia's father, several Popes, Queens Joan of Naples, Eleanor of Cyprus, and Margaret of Sweden and even the uncle of the Grand Inquisitor, Torquemada, vouching for her sanctity. In 1492, celebrating the centenary of her canonization, her *Revelations* was printed, instead of handwritten, for the first time. It was fitting that the first edition of this book appeared, six centuries after her canonization, in 1991. Similarly, this second edition is prepared, again in Italy, on the Eve of the Jubilee of 2000, recalling Birgitta's prophecies concerning the Jubilee of 1350.

Much of this book's material I learned from my colleagues, Professors John Fleming, Gail McMurray Gibson, Julian Jaynes, William Jordan, Jean

Preston, of Princeton University, Jeanne Krochalis, Pennsylvania State University, David Anderson, University of Tübingen (who noted Vauchez' work on canonization materials as a mode for conveying history), Clifford and Audrey Davidson, University of Western Michigan, Anthony Luttrell, Bath, Amy Vandersall, University of Colorado, Boulder, and Judson Boyce Allen, all of whom have taught me to love medieval justice, medieval manuscripts and medieval archives. Also greatly deserving of thanks is Professor Jane Chance of Rice University who commissioned this book, and who has stimulated and supported the work of fellow women scholars, so that they may in turn shape a generation of women readers believing in ourselves, a major example being this series, the Library of Medieval Women. My sister-in-law, Maria Antonia Bandres y Bolton, will remember our visit together to the monastery of Farfa because my brother, Richard Rothwell Bolton, had found in its library our father's book on Pope John XXIII. Princeton University allowed me to teach a seminar on Medieval Pilgrimage and Literature, where I first really encountered this tiny, intrepid woman saint and pilgrim. My student, John Wheaton, then pilgrimaged to Sweden. Next, Joan Bechtold incorporated Birgitta of Sweden into her Master's Thesis, along with Matilda of Tuscany and Catherine of Siena, on the three women who dialogued with Popes and Emperors. John Wheaton became a journalist, Joan Bechtold a lawyer. As an undergraduate student, Lancia Chadwick carefully read this book's manuscript and made suggestions for similar readers.

A separate book on the Life of Saint Birgitta, translated from the complete text by Birger Gregersson and, perhaps, Thomas Gascoigne, and which gives a more complete bibliography, is published by Peregrina Publishing, Toronto, Canada. An article, 'Bride, Julian, Margery and Alice: Birgitta of Sweden's Textual Community in Medieval England', appeared in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, edited by Sandra J. McEntire, and published by Garland Press, New York, 1992 and it also appeared in *Jerusalem: Essays on Pilgrimage and Literature*, there listing as well Brigittine, Julian and Margery manuscripts and incunabula, published by AMS Press, New York, 1998. The Latin text of the Florentine Paradiso document was published in connection with the 1991 Brigittine Congress in Rome.

Thanks are due to the Graduate Committee on Research and Creative Work of the University of Colorado at Boulder and the College of Arts and Sciences for travel grants enabling me to visit libraries in Sweden, England, France, Italy and the Vatican on a pilgrimage quest amidst Brigittine manuscripts and books, as well as to the Interlibrary Loan Service of the University of Colorado's Norlin Library. I thank Father Leonard Boyle at the Vatican Library, and likewise Florentine librarians, at the Biblioteca Nazionale, the Laurentian and the Riccardian, and the archivists at the Archivio di Stato; also librarians and scholars in England, especially the Bodleian and the British

Library, Bavaria, Paris, and Sweden, including Birger Bergh, Esbjörne Belfrage and Arne Jönsson of Lund University. I am grateful to Father Michael Maclean of Norwich Cathedral for his information about Julian and Margery and Father John E. Halborg for reading this book in manuscript. Thanks are due too to Christopher de Hamel of Sothebys, London, and to Julian Plante of the Hill Monastic Library, for information on the whereabouts of several Syon and Brigittine manuscripts. I also wish to thank those who gave hospitality to this pilgrim writer, the Community of the Holy Family, Ingrid de Hevesy Rådman, Diana Leap, Giorgio Nencetti, Jeremy DuQuesnay Adams and Bonnie Wheeler. The woodblocks in this book are taken from Andreas Lindblom, *Den Heliga Birgitta bildverk i skulptur och måleri från sveriges medeltid* (Stockholm: P.A. Norstedt, 1918), who in turn reproduced them from the first edition of Birgitta's *Revelations*, her Life and Writings, printed in Lübeck in 1492. The engravings, as much as does the text, stress the importance of Saint Bride and her Book. Above all, I wish to thank the Lady Abbess of Syon, the Prioress and Father Bachbauer of Altomünster, and Sister Patricia of Vadstena, for their great kindness. I had not expected, when I started this quest, to find that women throughout Europe can still live the Rule Birgitta wrote. Nor had I expected to find such a wealth of medieval manuscripts written by, for and about women.

Last, and most, of all, I wish to thank Saint Bride and her Book for shaping this mirroring textuality and even my life of flesh and blood with her words and books these many centuries later. The concluding verse was written in 1374 by Bishop Nicholas Hermansson of Linköping, who had been Birgitta's sons' Latin teacher.

*Rosa, rorans bonitatem,
Stella, stillans claritatem,
Birgitta, vas gratiae*

Rose, bedewed with goodness,
Star, shining with clearness,
Birgitta, vessel of grace.

St. Bride's Day, 1990
Paradiso, Florence
Annunciation, 1999
Montebeni, Fiesole

Chronology of Saint Bride's Life, Times and Influence

- 1296 King Birger Magnusson asks Birger Persson to emend laws.
- 1303 Ingeborg, pregnant with Birgitta, shipwrecked, saved by Duke Eric. Birgitta born, Finsta.
- 1310 Ingeborg's death. Birgitta raised by Aunt Catherine of Apenäs.
- 1311 Birgitta's first Revelation. Virgin crowns Birgitta.
- 1316 Birgitta marries Ulf Gudmarson.
- 1330 Ulf, Lawman of Närke, or Nericia. Birgitta taught Latin with her sons by Nicholas Hermansson, later Bishop of Linköping. Birger Persson, Gudmar Ulfsson die. Ingeborg Ulfsdotter enters convent.
- 1332 Catherine Ulfsdotter born. Master Peter Olavi, Birgitta's tutor.
- 1335 King Magnus marries Blanche of Namur, Birgitta her governess.
- 1341 Virgin tells Birgitta she will see Christ in Jerusalem.
- 1342 Ulf and Birgitta make pilgrimage to Compostela. Ulf's illness in Arras. Nicholas Acciaiuoli founds Carthusian Certosa, Florence. Queen Joan of Naples, at 16, marries Andrew of Hungary.
- 1343 Julian of Norwich born.
- 1344 Ulf's death, burial at Alvastra. God makes Birgitta his Bride. Master Mathias her adviser.
- 1344-46 Rule of Order of Holy Saviour composed.
- 1345 Master Mathias, at Bride's request, translates Pentateuch into Swedish. Queen Joan has her husband, Andrew of Hungary, killed.
- 1346 Christ tells Bride to go to Rome. King Magnus gives Bride Vadstena.
- 1346-1349 Bishop Hemming of Åbo and Cistercian Prior Peter Olavi take Birgitta's *Revelations*, with Preface by Master Mathias, and *Rule* to Kings Edward III of England, Philip VI of France and Pope Clement VI.
- 1347 Bride prophesies of Christ as Ploughman bringing Black Death. Queen Joan marries Louis of Taranto, at instigation of Nicholas Acciaiuoli. Cola di Rienzo, Whitsunday, establishes Rome as Kingdom of the Holy Spirit.
- 1349 Bride leaves Sweden. Black Death outbreak, prophesied to King Magnus by Bride.
- 1350 Magister Mathias' death. Bride makes pilgrimage to Rome in Jubilee Year. Lodges in Cardinal's palace by Saint Lawrence in Damaso. Travels to Farfa. Catherine, her daughter, leaves for Rome.
- 1351 Bride tells Pope Clement VI to leave Avignon for Rome. Catherine prepares to return to Sweden. Eggert, her husband, dies. She decides to stay with Bride.
- 1352 Whitsunday, Coronation of Joan and Louis of Naples. 2 December, lightning strikes bells of St. Peters' and melts them. Christ had told

- Bride this would be sign of Pope Clement VI's death. He dies, 6 December. Bride starts writing *Sermo Angelicus* ['Word of the Angel'].
- 1354** Bride's household evicted from Cardinal's palace, moves to Francesca Papazuri's palace, which becomes Casa di Santa Brigida.
- 1355** Bride tells Emperor Charles of Bohemia to reform the Empire. April 2, he comes to Rome as pilgrim, April 5, is crowned in St. Peter's. 15 October, Pope Innocent VI sends Birger and Catherine 400 gold florins.
- 1358-1360** King Magnus of Sweden under papal interdict.
- 1360** Cecilia Ulfssdotter abducted by brother Charles from convent of St. Ingrid in Skenninge and married to knight.
- 1363** Israel Birgersson, Bride's brother, refuses crown of Sweden, dies on crusade in Riga.
- 1364** King Magnus captured in war, imprisoned. Albert elected king. Cecilia Ulfssdotter marries a second time.
- 1365-1367** Bride in Naples. She cures Lapa Acciaiuoli Buondelmonte's son, Esau, from terminal tuberculosis, crippling.
- 1366** Bride orders Pope Urban V and Emperor Charles to improve their rule. Birger Ulfsson builds Vadstena Abbey. Bride and Queen Joan of Naples meet. Bride at Nicholas Acciaiuoli's deathbed, as she predicted.
- 1367** Tax imposed on every Swedish citizen of 'Our Lady's Penny' to build Vadstena Abbey. 30 April, Pope Urban V leaves Avignon for Rome. Bride raises Roman nobleman's son from the dead, Gentile Orsini, by placing her cloak over his corpse. Andrea da Firenze finishes fresco.
- 1368** 21 October, Pope and Emperor in Rome. Alfonso of Jaén resigns bishopric, becomes Hieronymite hermit. Crucifix speaks to Bride at St. Paul's Outside the Walls, Rome. Julian of Norwich writes early *Showing of Love*?
- 1369** Bride predicts Pope's death if he returns to Avignon. 16 June, passport issued to Bride's family to travel to Bari.
- 1370** 4 August, Montefiascone, Pope Urban V's Bull grants Augustinian Rule, Rule of the Holy Saviour as supplement, no indulgence for Vadstena. Urban dies, 19 December. Thomas Stubbs, Richard Lavenham at Oxford, acquire *Revelations*, lecturing on the text.
- 1371** Bride asks the new Pope, Gregory XI, to come to Rome.
- 1372** Bride begins pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Charles Ulfsson dying in Naples. 11 March, Naples, 14 March, sails to Messina from Naples, reaching Messina, 19 March, Cyprus, 26 March, Cephalonia, 30 March, in great tempest going to Cos, 1-4 April, greeted by Master of the Order of St John Hospitaller, 8 April, Cyprus, Paphos, then, with a good wind, Famagusta. Birger Ulfsson dubbed a knight in Holy Sepulchre. Bride receives many Revelations on Calvary and in Bethlehem as she had been promised by the Virgin when in Sweden.

- 1373 13 May, Julian of Norwich's Revelation. 23 July, Bride dies in Papazuri house near Campo dei Fiori, body brought to Saint Lawrence in Panisperna and laid in marble sarcophagus. Francesca Papazuri places painting of Crucifixion in room of Bride's death.
- 1374 Bones of right arm left in Panisperna. 4 July, Catherine and Birger bring Bride's remains to Vadstena. Catherine, Abbess, of nuns, Petrus Olavi, Confessor General, of monks. *Revelations* and other writings edited and published as fine illuminated manuscripts. King Magnus' death at sea. Catherine of Siena examined by the Dominican Chapter General, Spanish Chapel, Santa Maria Novella. Pope sends her Bishop Hermit Alfonso of Jaén as director.
- 1375 Pope Gregory XI returns to Rome. Catherine, at the King of Sweden's request, comes to Rome to negotiate Bride's canonization.
- 1376 Pope Gregory XI proposes Bride's canonization to Cardinals. Cardinal Adam Easton, Norwich Benedictine, appointed to read documents.
- 1377 Pope Gregory XI's death.
- 1378 Pope Urban VI unwilling to canonize Bride. Codex Saint Lawrence in Panisperna.
- 1379 Catherine stops Tiber from flooding Rome. 3 December, Pope Urban VI establishes Brigittine Rule, canonization process begun.
- 1380 Catherine receives Bull from Pope permitting Bride's remains to be enshrined, returns to Sweden.
- 1381 Master Peter Olavi's and Catherine's deaths. Peasants' Revolt, Wyclif's first complete Bible. Richard Rolle's canonization proposed.
- 1383 Cardinal Adam Easton, Norwich Benedictine, appointed as one of three Cardinals to study Birgitta's writings. 8 December, Francesca Papazuri's Deed of Gift of Casa di Santa Brigida to Vadstena.
- 1384 23 October, 21 monks, 46 nuns enclosed at Vadstena by Bishop Nicholas Hermansson.
- 1385 Three Vadstena monks in Rome for canonization process.
- 1386 Adam Easton tortured and imprisoned in dungeon, vows to work for Bride's canonization if he is saved from execution for conspiracy against Pope Urban VI. Five other Cardinals die.
- 1388 Vadstena rebuilt in stone after fire.
- 1389 Cardinal Adam Easton freed by Pope Boniface IX, has his books shipped to Norwich, where he likely writes *Defensorium Sanctae Birgittae*.
- 1391 Birger Ulfsson dies, 26 August. Cecilia Ulfsdotter dies. Bride canonized, 7 October. Boniface IX's bull, 9 October, canonization, indulgence. Nuns of Saint Lawrence in Panisperna enshrine relic.
- 1392 Julian of Norwich completes Long Text, *Showing of Love*.
- 1406 Philippa, daughter of Henry IV of England, marries Eric of Sweden.
- 1411-12 Hoccleve quotes Bride's *Revelations* in *Regement of Princes*.

- 1413** Date given in Julian of Norwich's Short Text, *Showing of Love*. Margery Kempe visits Casa di Santa Brigida in Rome, meets Bride's maidservant, Katherine of Flanders.
- 1415** Henry V lays foundation stone of Brigittine Syon Abbey. Vadstena nuns and monks arrive at Lynn, travel to Syon Abbey.
- 1418** Birgitta Karlsdotter, Bride's great granddaughter, when dying has vision of Bride and wild strawberries, buried at Vadstena.
- 1419** April, Pope Martin V confirms Bride's canonization, approves Rule for Brigittine Rule for Syon Abbey at instigation of Henry V.
- 1434** Margery Kempe visits Sheen, Syon Abbey.
- 1436** *Book of Margery Kempe*.

Map of Saint Bride's Pilgrimages and Brigittine Convents



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