

The Manuscripts of *Revelationes S. Birgittae*

by Hans Aili

PREFACE

This paper was originally published in the conference volume entitled *Santa Brigida, Napoli, l'Italia*.¹ It is an extension of the oral presentation I made at that conference in May, 2006. It summarises findings I have already published, mainly in my editions of Birgitta's *Reuelaciones*, Book IV (AILI 1992) Book VIII (AILI 2002), as well as in my major contribution to the history of the Birgittine manuscripts, *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae* (AILI – SVANBERG 2003); for a detailed discussion of my findings and a full set of references, the reader is referred to these works.

THE GENESIS OF THE REVELATIONS

The history of the conception and codification of the *Reuelaciones Sanctae Birgittae* makes a fascinating study. Our primary source are the Acts of Canonisation (*Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*) edited by COLLIJN², which document the testimonies that were recorded during the years 1379 to 1380 for the purpose of effecting Birgitta's canonisation. Here we find a brief history of their genesis that forms part of the Life of Birgitta (the Process *Vita*) that was penned by her two father-confessors, Prior Petrus and *Magister* Petrus.

The Process *Vita* clearly states that Birgitta received her visions and wrote them down in the Swedish language, that is in her mother tongue, and that without delay she had them translated into Latin. On those occasions when Birgitta was unable to write them down by her own hand, she used to dictate them in Swedish to her father-confessor, who in his turn had them written down (by his own hand or by a scribe). It is also said that Birgitta herself made a final check on the wording. As the *Vita* was written in order to support the claim for a canonisation, it was important for its authors to emphasise the authenticity of her Revelations, and the description of the method of producing the Latin version may therefore have been adjusted to serve a particular purpose. On the other hand, the Latin version was certainly in the 14th century regarded as the authentic one, and the Swedish original hardly more than a working material. Latin was the international language of those days, the language that all men of learning used for their daily communication, while the Swedish language was so unknown that the testimony of the Process *Vita* does not even name it but only refers to it as the «language of the people» (*lingua vulgaris*).

The Latin version was written down and collected in gatherings, normally of four to six sheets, making sixteen to twenty-four book-pages each. The number of gatherings

¹ FERM, O., PERRICOLI SAGGESE, A., ROTILI 2009:153-160.

² COLLIJN 1924-31.

grew apace and soon required editorial work if the mass of text was to retain any order. Some of the books in the work provided their own order: this is the case of *Liber questionum* (the Book of Questions or Book V), being a set of revelations that Birgitta received as one, coherent vision while riding on horseback on her way to the palace at Vadstena. Book VII, too, is a chronologically coherent set of Revelations received during Birgitta's pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1372 to 1373. Book IV, on the other hand, which is the largest in terms of chapters, originally contained 130 revelations based on visions received in many places and on many different occasions. Birgitta was certainly concerned about this disorder. The Process *Vita* records that as early as in 1370 she had visions in the form of instructions from the Virgin Mary to make Alfonso of Jaén, Birgitta's Spanish father-confessor, write down and copy the Revelations which had been kept secret until then. In the year 1372 these instructions were repeated, this time in a vision of the Lord, when Birgitta was staying at Famagusta, Cyprus; this time the task was not merely to have the Revelations written down and copied: Alfonso was also instructed to ensure that they received a clearer formulation and kept to the dogma (*Extravagantes* 49,4):

Nunc igitur ut ipsa pluribus linguis conueniant, trade omnes libros reuelacionum eorundem verborum meorum episcopo meo heremite, qui conscribat et obscura elucidet et catholicum sensum spiritus mei teneat.

So, in order that these very words may now fit more languages, hand over all the books of Revelations of these very words of mine to my Bishop, the Hermit, who shall write them down and clarify that which is obscure and hold fast to the Catholic sense of my spirit.

On her deathbed, Birgitta repeated this commission, now on the instructions that came in a vision of Christ.

THE EXPANSION OF THE CORPUS OF REVELATIONS

By the time of Birgitta's death in 1373 the *corpus* of Revelations had reached a point where a couple of the books were in the main finished, while the others existed in varying states of editorial order. This was the situation when Alfonso made his contribution as Editor of the Revelations.

The first result of his labours was finished between January 17th (the day when Pope Gregory XI made his solemn entrance in Rome) and May 29th. On the latter date he was first approached concerning the canonisation of Birgitta, and then there would have existed at least one codex containing the complete text of the Revelations. We know the scope of this manuscript very well: it contained *Prologus Magister Matthiae (ProlM)*, Book I (60 chapters), Book II (30 chapters), Book III (34 chapters), Book IV (130 chapters), Book V preceded by Alfonso's Prologue, Book VI (109 chapters), and Book VII (31 chapters). Carl-Gustaf UNDHAGEN³ gave this arrangement the name «Alfonso's First Redaction» on the strength of the fact that the oldest Italian manuscripts state that Alfonso's collection contained seven books. Indeed, Book VII is often regularly, in the oldest manuscripts, named *Ultimus liber secundum Alfonso* (The Final Book According to Alfonso).

³ The fundamental study of this process is by UNDHAGEN 1978:14ff.

The members of the commission appointed for the canonisation proceedings depended for their success on having access to Alfonso's edition, and the work of copying this work appears to have proceeded fast. Magnus Petri, first Confessor-General of Vadstena Abbey, narrates in a letter written between the years 1385 and 1391 that Katarina (Birgitta's daughter), Prior Petrus, and *Magister* Petrus presented the Revelations to Pope Gregory XI *in pluribus voluminibus conscripte, quia sic commodius a pluribus inspici potuerunt* (written in many volumes, as in this way they could be inspected by more people).⁴ The Pope formed a commission, consisting of five Cardinals, one Archbishop, three *Magistri*, and, finally, Alfonso himself. After Gregory's demise in 1377, the process had to be re-started by the new pope, Urban VI, the four Swedish Birgittines, Katarina, Prior Peter, Frater Nicolaus Andree, and Magnus Petri having approached him and handed over a copy of the text. On December 15th, 1378, the Pope formed a new commission, now even larger, comprising six Cardinals and a number of Bishops, Doctors, Licentiate, and *Magistri*, and even others. Alfonso was a member of this commission also. Another member named is Matheus de Cracovia, *Magister* at Prague University, later to be Professor at Heidelberg University and Bishop of Worms.

It is very probable — as UNDHAGEN⁵ proposed — that both commissions received books with the same text contents. As late as in December, 1378, the Revelations corpus therefore consisted of *ProlM* and seven Books of Revelations. The collective name was *Liber celestis Reuelacionum* («The Heavenly Book of Revelations»). The only surviving manuscript containing a set of Revelations texts with precisely the scope of this original Corpus is Warszawa, Biblioteka Narodowa, MS 3310, dated to the late 1370s. Another contemporary Neapolitan manuscript, known to have contained the same original corpus is *Liber Alfonsi*, was sent by Alfonso to Sweden in the late 1370s. It belonged to Vadstena Abbey, probably until the Reformation in the early 16th century, and was the exemplar of the entire Vadstena tradition of the Revelations text. Its version of the basic corpus, expanded with subsequent additions and material already located at Vadstena, survives in two Swedish manuscripts, *Codex Kalmarnensis* and *Codex Falkenberg*, both at Lund University Library; *Liber Alfonsi* itself, however, was lost, probably a victim of the harsh treatment meted out to Swedish monasteries by the Swedish Crown.

Only three manuscripts of the canonisation generation now remain to us; as they were all produced in Naples, it is a further assumption that the entire series were of this provenance. The survivors are, in chronological order: Warszawa (see above), datable to ca. 1377; New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M.498, datable to 1377/78; Palermo, Biblioteca centrale della regione Siciliana, MS IV.G.2., datable to between 1379 and 1391.⁶

If we assume that all members of the two commissions received their own copies of the Revelations corpus, those made for the first commission numbered about ten, and the additional members of the second commission required at least a further ten copies. Magnus Petri moreover indicates that the *Revelationes Sanctae Birgittae* were in vogue in his time and that quite a few Princes of the Church as well as secular princes and academics

⁴ UNDHAGEN 1978:13, note 22.

⁵ UNDHAGEN 1978:14.

⁶ The full pictorial contents of these three manuscripts was published in full-colour reproductions in *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae* (2003, Vol. II, while a smaller number of plates of less quality (but still in colour) are to be found in the conference volume (2009). No permit has been secured, however, for publishing these pictures in this online version.

— many of whom Magnus reported by name or title — requested copies, arriving personally in Rome for this purpose or sending messengers. It therefore seems safe to calculate that the final number of manuscripts produced by the Naples scriptorium, in the late 1370s and during the 1380s, was between thirty and fifty, many of which were finished with a high degree of luxury and at considerable expense.

Alfonso's work as Editor resulted in expansions of the original *Corpus Revelationum*; these additions took the form of four separate Books. The first was the *Liber celestis Imperatoris ad Reges*,⁷ a Mirror of Kings in 58 chapters, of which 25 had been taken over in their entirety and adapted from the original corpus, three had been used partly to form new chapters, while the remaining 20 had never belonged to the original corpus.⁸ Very early in the process of copying, the Neapolitan scriptorium appears to have expanded the original corpus into one containing *ProlM*, Revelations Books I to VII, and *LAR*. Alfonso further sent three separate works, *Regula Sancti Salvatoris (RS)*, *Sermo angelicus (SA)*, and *Quattuor oraciones (QO)*, that are subsumed under the title *Opera minora*.

The textual tradition of the *Corpus Revelationum* with additional Books offers clear evidence that Alfonso actually sent the scriptorium two exemplars for copying. The first book to arrive contained the original *Corpus Revelationum* and with a redaction of the text on which Alfonso had spent a certain amount of editorial work.⁹ At least two manuscripts, viz. *Liber Alfonsi* and the Warsaw manuscript, were copied with these contents and this text version, and were sent off to their recipients. The next event, in chronological order, is the arrival of *LAR* and the three additional books, *RS*, *SA*, and *QO*. There are indications that the scriptorium at this stage regarded the Corpus proper as containing *ProlM*, Rev. I-VII, and *LAR*, and that the three additional books were added or omitted according to the subscribers' request. The manuscripts copied from this exemplar belong to the family now called π and are characterized by a number of shared textual errors; to this family belong the two Swedish manuscripts mentioned above, Codex Falkenberg and Codex Kalmarnensis. Very soon after sending the various books of the π exemplar, Alfonso appears to have sent a further complete set of books; this exemplar is now dubbed β . Remarkably, this exemplar gives a text that represents an earlier stage in Alfonso's editorial work, or even the state of text existing before he had started his work in earnest. The reason for this is hard to fathom, but may be due to plain carelessness on Alfonso's part.

In the process of copying, the scriptorium from this time onwards used either exemplar, either exclusively or interchangeably, as if the textual contents they offer was completely identical in quality. The Warsaw manuscript which came into existence before the arrival of β therefore offers a true π text; so did *Liber Alfonsi* (a fact attested by its descendants) while the slightly younger New York manuscript offers the β text but contains numerous corrections belonging to the π tradition, inserted in the margins and between the lines; both exemplars were used in turn for the Palermo manuscript, some books exhibiting the π text, others the β text.

A further Revelations manuscript of the same provenance, but produced after Birgitta's canonisation of 1391, is Torino, Biblioteca nazionale, MS I.III.23.¹⁰

⁷ Here abbreviated *LAR* (*Liber ad reges*).

⁸ See AILI 2002:21-22.

⁹ On the nature of Alfonso's work, see AILI 2000.

¹⁰ Severely damaged during the library fire of 1904, it was subsequently partly restored.

PRODUCTS OF A NEAPOLITAN SCRIPTORIUM

As has been convincingly demonstrated by Italian art historians, notably LATTANZI, PUTATURO MURANO and DE FLORIANI, the scriptorium producing these four manuscripts also made illuminated manuscripts with other textual contents. The full list of surviving products of this scriptorium contains no less than ten codexes, this being their most likely chronological order:

Wien, Bible, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek MS 1191
Milano, *Tito Livio*¹¹, Lib. I-X, Biblioteca Trivulziana, MS. 166
Napoli, *Tragoediae Senecae*, Biblioteca Oratoriana dei Girolamini, MS. CF.II.5
Oxford, Psalter, Bodleian Library, Canon. Liturg. 151
Warsaw (see above)
New York (see above)
Albenga, Missal, Biblioteca capitolare MS A.2.
Palermo (see above)
Napoli, *Hippocratis Aphorismi*¹², Biblioteca Nazionale MS. VIII.D.25
Torino (see above)

SIGNATURE OF A SCRIPTORIUM

While studying the New York manuscript of the Revelations in the original, at the Pierpont Morgan Library, I noticed a number of curious traits in the structuring of the sheets of vellum in relation to the full-page illuminations, the historiated initials and the text itself. When I compared these traits with the situation obtaining in the Warsaw and Palermo manuscripts, a pattern emerged that I consider indicative of a very precious and costly method of production favoured by the scriptorium; further analysis has shown that the same traits are present, to a smaller or a higher degree, in those other surviving manuscripts, stemming from the same scriptorium, that are coeval with the Revelations manuscripts. They therefore offer a signature of the production methods of the scriptorium itself. Progressing from the more obvious to the more arcane, my results may be summarised in the following fashion.

1. The quires of parchment are organised so that the first sheet is oriented with its flesh-page facing outwards, the second the other way round, and so on in an alternating sequence. The consequence is that the pages facing one another always show the same structure, flesh page facing flesh page and vice versa. This, of course, is a very common basic form of arrangement in parchment manuscripts of the Middle Ages, but the Naples manuscripts differ in one important respect from the rule, as once described by THOMPSON (1894:62) and later formulated in the following fashion by DE HAMEL (1993:19): «In manuscripts from the late Roman Empire and from the Greek Orthodox world, the first and last pages of a gathering are the original flesh side. This was revived by the humanist

¹¹ Medieval Italian translation of Titus Livius' *Ab urbe condita libri*, books I-X.

¹² Latin translation by Niccolò da Regio.

manuscript-makers of fifteenth-century Italy. But for the rest of Europe from the pre-Carolingian to high Gothic periods, the first and last pages of a gathering are the original hair side of the parchment.»

DE HAMEL (1994:89) further emphasised the regularity of this system: «If the scribes made their gatherings by folding the vellum in half several times, as explained above, it will always work out exactly that the hair-side faces the hair-side and the flesh-side faces the flesh-side throughout a gathering. This makes for neatness. The first page of a gathering would be the hair-side, and the neatness applied right through the manuscript. Medieval scribes always arranged their leaves like this if it was at all possible.» The Naples manuscripts, we recall, dating from the middle to the end of the 14th century, differ significantly from the system described by being consistently arranged so that the first page of each gathering is the flesh-side, not the hair-side. Further studies will be necessary to resolve this conflict: it may be the case that most Italian manuscript-makers of the 14th century, not just the humanist ones, had joined the new programme.

2. Every Revelations book is treated as a separate unit, starting on the very first page of a gathering, irrespective of where the preceding book ended. If necessary, the final gathering of one book is either adjusted in size, or contains pages or even leaves left unwritten, in order to make the new unit of text conform to this structural rule. The Warsaw manuscript, being the eldest remaining, starts off in confusion, but confirms to the structural rule at the point of the shift between Books IV and V. Among the other surviving Naples manuscripts, those produced before the Warsaw manuscript show no sign of following the rule just stated — in the Vienna Bible, even the shift from the Old Testament to the New occurs inside a gathering, without any significant structural break, as the former Book ends on fol. 361V and the latter begins on fol. 362Ra; the manuscripts dated as coeval to the Warsaw manuscript, or belonging to a later date, on the other hand, show evidence of following this rule. This is also true, with minor variations, of the Oxford *Psalter*, the Albenga *Missale*, and the Naples *Hippocrates*. We have thus found a trait that may be described as a signature of this scriptorium, one that developed in precision during the years, and certainly set a mark of luxuriousness on its products. The two youngest Revelations manuscripts (New York and Palermo), the Naples *Hippocrates*, and the Torino manuscript of the Revelations demonstrate the highest degree of adherence to the rule. However, my analysis of this signature does not extend to any systematic study of other Italian manuscripts of the end of the *Trecento*.

RECONSTRUCTION OF MUTILATIONS

The observations made concerning the relation between the structuring of the parchment sheets, the text, and the illuminations, permitted me to offer a reconstruction of the original number of illuminations contained in the three oldest Revelations manuscripts. These pictures are consistently placed on a verso page, which is also the flesh-side of the parchment, facing the first historiated initial of the respective books — Illumination No. 1 faces *Prologus Magistri Mathiae*, Illumination No. 2 faces Book V (*Liber Questionum*), and Illumination No. 3 faces *Liber ad reges* (Book VIII).

The present state of conservation is that Illumination No. 1 and No. 3 survive only in the New York manuscript, while Illumination No. 2 is only to be found in the Warsaw

manuscript. The Palermo manuscript to-day contains no illuminations at all. The structural evidence presented and discussed in *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae* (AILI – SVANBERG 2003: 43-46) makes it possible to conclude, with a great degree of likelihood, that the Warsaw manuscript, which has been mutilated in many places, suffered its greatest mutilation by being robbed of Illumination No. 1. Furthermore, there is a considerable possibility that Illumination No. 2, depicting the genesis of *Liber Questionum*, was originally also present in the New York and Palermo manuscripts, not only in the Warsaw one.

The evidence supporting these two theories is based on my observations of the structuring of the codices in question, and, as it is very detailed, the reader is referred to *Imagines Sanctae Birgittae*. The first-mentioned theory is also strongly supported by evidence that can be observed in Illumination No. 1 and in Initial No. 2 of the programme, as rendered by the three manuscripts. The theory was dramatically supported by a puzzle that confronted Professor Svanberg at our joint visit to Biblioteka Narodowa, in November 1993. He had noticed that Illumination No. 1 depicts a pilgrim's staff and hat, the symbols of Birgitta's pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela; the same motif is present in Initial No. 2 of the Palermo manuscript, which does not offer Illumination No. 1. Too important to be omitted, these symbols were entered into a suitable historiated initial instead. The New York manuscript, offering the symbols of the pilgrimage in Illumination No. 1, does not repeat them in Initial No. 2, which appears logical under the circumstances. The puzzle that Professor Svanberg had observed was that the Warsaw manuscript omits the symbols altogether, which appeared inconceivable. As I had noticed that the Warsaw manuscript showed traces of severe mutilation right at its beginning, I was at that moment trying out the theory that Illumination No. 1 had been removed along with the entire gathering. I therefore saw Professor Svanberg's puzzle as convincing proof of my own theory — if the symbols of pilgrimage had been depicted in Illumination No. 1, just as in the New York manuscript, and this Illumination had been removed, their absence from Initial No. 2 was fully understandable!

No corresponding pictorial evidence offers itself to support my theory that Illumination No. 2 was forcibly removed from both the New York, and the Palermo manuscript; the evidence I can adduce for this is purely structural, and thus less securely founded.

This programme of three illuminations is also still surviving in the Torino manuscript, although in a damaged state owing to the library fire of 1904; when the manuscript was conserved, they were not re-entered at their correct locations; the programme has also been supplemented with a fourth illumination, facing *Regula Salvatoris*. That the programme originally contained the three illuminations here called No. 1, 2, and 3, is attested by the fact that it can be found in its entirety in surviving, younger manuscripts of German origins, notably Berlin, Staatsbibliothek der Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, MS. theol. Lat. fol. 33, and Stockholm, Kungl. Biblioteket, Cod. A70b (the «Ericsson Manuscript»).

My theory may be summarised as a table:

Manuscript	Warsaw	New York	Palermo	Torino	Berlin	Ericsson
Ill. No. 1	Mutilated	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ill. No. 2	Yes	Mutilated	Mutilated	Yes	Yes	Yes

Ill. No. 3 N/A¹³ Yes No Yes Yes Yes

SUMMARY

This paper summarises the author's contribution to the history of the earliest Birgittine manuscripts, by recounting and summarising a number of new theories concerning the expansion and copying of the Birgittine corpus of texts, as well as a number of observations and theories concerning the structuring and original pictorial contents of the three earliest, Italian manuscripts of *Reuelaciones Sanctae Birgittae*, dating from the end of the *Trecento*.

Hans Aili
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¹³ The Warsaw manuscript ends with Book VII and never contained *Liber ad reges*.

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