

# The Virgin in the Ghent Altarpiece and the Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden

Angela Maria La Delfa<sup>1</sup>

Recibido: 15 de mayo de 2020 / Aceptado: 04 de julio de 2020

**Abstract.** This article demonstrates that the Revelations were essential for the creation of a new iconography of the Virgin for the Flemish art of the first decades of the 15th century. The aim is that to analyze the wide-range of Brigittine texts that explain the symbolic elements of the painting which are related to the iconography of the Virgin, to her physical and symbolic features and attributes, and to Marian dogmas, especially those of the Perpetual Virginity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The depiction of the Virgin in the Ghent Altarpiece is, in many respects, brand new and reveals how the symbolism of the last medieval centuries had given way to the new demands of devotional and mystical literature. The interest in female mysticism within the territories of Flanders and Brabant dates back to the beginning of the 13th century, when the development of a new female religious movement took place. In this environment particularly sensitive to the feminine word, the works of Bridget could find the right reception and her Mariology could inspire the representation of the Virgin of the Ghent Altarpiece.

**Keywords:** Saint Bridget of Sweden, Revelaciones Coelestes, Jan van Eyck, Hubert van Eyck, Ghent Altarpiece, Iconography of the Virgin Mary.

## [es] La Virgen en el Políptico de Gante y las revelaciones de Santa Brígida de Suecia

**Resumen.** Este artículo demuestra que las Revelaciones de santa Brígida fueron esenciales para la creación de una nueva iconografía de la Virgen para el arte flamenco de las primeras décadas del siglo XV. El objetivo es analizar el amplio espectro de textos brigidinos que explican los elementos simbólicos de la pintura relacionados con la iconografía de la Virgen, con su representación física y simbólica y los atributos, y con los dogmas marianos, especialmente aquellos de la Virginitad Perpetua, la Inmaculada Concepción y la Asunción. La pintura de la Virgen en la tabla de Altar de Gante es, en muchos aspectos, una nueva creación, y revela cómo el simbolismo de los últimos siglos del Medioevo han dado paso a nuevas exigencias de la literatura mística y devocional. El interés en el misticismo femenino dentro de los territorios de Flandes y Brabante se remonta a los inicios del siglo XIII, cuando se da el desarrollo de un nuevo movimiento religioso femenino. En este ambiente particularmente sensible a la palabra femenina, las obras de Brígida pueden tener la debida recepción y su mariología pudo inspirar la representación de la Virgen del Políptico de Gante.

**Palabras clave:** Santa Brígida de Suecia; *Revelaciones Celestes*; Jan van Eyck; Hubert van Eyck; Políptico de Gante; iconografía de la Virgen María.

**Contents.** 1. Introduction. 2. The new iconography of the Virgin: the physical features according to the *Revelations*. 3. Marian dogmas according to Saint Bridget reflected in the Ghent Altarpiece. 4. Conclusion. 5. References.

**How to cite:** La Delfa, A. M. (2020). The Virgin in the Ghent Altarpiece and the Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden. *De Medio Aevo* 14, 83-98.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The *Revelations* of Saint Bridget of Sweden are an important iconographic source of figurative

art.<sup>3</sup> Comparisons between some Brigittine texts and the early 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish panel painting have revealed that there has been more than one circumstance in which the *Revelations* have

<sup>1</sup> University of Maryland Global Campus  
E-mail: [angela.ladelfa@faculty.umgc.edu](mailto:angela.ladelfa@faculty.umgc.edu)  
ORCID: 0000-0002-9752-442X

<sup>2</sup> Saint Bridget was born in Finsta around 1303 into one of the noblest and most important families of 14<sup>th</sup> century Sweden. In 1349, she moved to Rome, at the invitation of Christ, to fulfill her prophetic call. The saint proposed the resolution of the grave moral and institutional crisis of the Church in the years of the Avignon Papacy. A great pilgrim and promoter not only of the religious reform but also of a social and political one of 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe, she died in Rome in 1373. For the *corpus* of Bridget's *Vitae* see *BHL*, vol. I, pp. 199-202, nos. 1334-1359 and the acts of the canonization process Collijn, Isak (1924-31), ed., *Acta et processus canonizationis beate Birgitte*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksells. The Brigittine corpus includes about seven hundred revelations that her last confessor, Alfonso of Jaén († 1389), collected by themes and divided into twelve books. See *Revelationes S. Brigittae, olim à card. Turrecremata recognitæ, nunc à Consaluo Duranto notis illustratae. Locis etiam quam plurimis ex manuscriptis codicibus restitutis, ac emendatis*, Romæ, in ædibus sanctæ Brigittæ viduæ, apud Stephanum Paolinum, 1606.

been their source of inspiration.<sup>3</sup> Among these, the most important example is certainly the Ghent Altarpiece which has only recently been put at the center of the debate.<sup>4</sup> The connection between the Brigittine literature and the Van Eyck brothers, which has been proposed only in 2015 in an article by Grantley McDonald, was analyzed in detail in my Doctoral dissertation which was discussed the same year.<sup>5</sup>

In the last several decades, there has been a rediscovery of female hagiographic and spiritual texts, especially in Flanders and Brabant, both of which were also decisive in the development of Swedish mysticism.<sup>6</sup> The interest in female mysticism within those territories dates back to the beginning of the 13th century, when the development of a new female religious movement took place.<sup>7</sup> Thus, there existed in the Low Countries an environment particularly sensitive to the feminine word where the works of Bridget could find the right reception. It is not by chance that the Order of the Holy Savior, which spread throughout Europe thanks to elite patrons, enjoyed a particularly fruitful season in Flanders. The order founded by Bridget was extraordinarily popular in the same regions where her writings had been so enthusiastically adopted. The presence in the Netherlands of many monasteries of the order, with a higher density than in any other European nation, shows that those territories were at the center of the spread of Bridget's spirituality and writings (Fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>



Fig. 1. Map of the spread of Brigittine monasteries. Image: Nyberg, Tore, *Birgittinische Klostergründungen des Mittelalters*, front page.

The Brigittine texts were immensely popular. The Duke Philip the Good himself commissioned a copy of the Revelations and in modern collections in Belgium and Netherlands there are many examples of manuscripts of Bridget's writings commissioned and realized there.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Panofsky, Erwin (1971), *Early Netherlandish Painting*, New York, Harper & Row, vol. 1, 21-50, esp. 46 and 158-159; Millard, Meiss (1945), "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings", *The Art Bulletin* (27), 175-181; Westcott, Catherine Morris (1992), "Birgittine devotion and the Campinesque Virgin in the Apse", *Athanor* 11, 32-41.

<sup>4</sup> The Ghent Altarpiece was initiated by Hubert van Eyck from an uncertain date, perhaps as early as 1424. His brother Jan succeeded him on his death on 18 September 1426. The altarpiece was concluded and exhibited to the public on 6 May 1432. It was commissioned by the rich and powerful Jodocus Vijd and by his wife Elizabeth Borluut for their private chapel in Saint Bavo's cathedral in Ghent. The literature is very vast and focuses on multiple aspects including the attribution of the panels and the adherence to an initial project. See Pächt, Otto (2002), *Van Eyck: die Begründer der altniederländischen Malerei*, München, Prestel; Baldass, Ludwig (1952), *Jan van Eyck*, London, Phaidon; Panofsky 1971; Châtelet, Albert (2011), *Hubert et Jan van Eyck créateurs de l'Agneau mystique*, Dijon, Faton; Herzner, Volker (1995), *Jan van Eyck und der Genter Altar*, Worms, Werner; Dhanens, Elizabeth (1973), *Van Eyck. The Ghent Altarpiece*, New York, Lane; Brand Philip, Lotte (1980), *The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton, Princeton University Press; Goodgal, Dana Ruth (1980), *The Iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece Diss.*, University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>5</sup> McDonald, Grantley (2015), "A Further Source for the Ghent Altarpiece? The Revelations of Bridget of Sweden", *Oud Holland* 128.1, 1-16; La Delfa, Angela Maria (2015), *Le Rivelazioni di santa Brigida di Svezia e l'iconografia: il caso dei Van Eyck*, Diss. Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana.

<sup>6</sup> The Swedish Dominican friar, Peter of Dacia († 1289), author of the life of Christine of Stommeln († 1312), attended the *Studium* of Cologne founded by Albert the Great. On his return to Sweden, he brought with him a wealth of experience on mysticism which, in all likelihood, also had an influence on the Swedish mysticism of Bridget's time. See Bartolomei Romagnoli, Alessandra (2013), *Santità e mistica femminile nel Medioevo*, Spoleto, Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 415-446.

<sup>7</sup> As documented by recent studies, the rich production of *Vitae* by holy women of the region, referring to hagiographers from the canonical milieu and of the Order of Preacher Friars, was testimony of a new spiritual sensitivity centered on some fundamental themes such as: the rich Marian devotion, the attention to the humanity of Christ and the participation in his sufferings, the centrality assigned to the Eucharistic sacrament and the anti-heretic commitment. See Bartolomei Romagnoli, Alessandra, Degl'Innocenti, Antonella, Santi, Francesco (2015-2018), eds., *Scrittrici mistiche europee*, 2 voll., Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo; Bartolomei Romagnoli 2013, pp. 415-446; Meersseman, Gilles Gérard (1948), "Les frères précheurs et le mouvement dévot en Flandre au XIIIe S.", *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 18, 69-130; McGinn, Bernard (1994), ed., *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, New York, Continuum.

<sup>8</sup> The monastery of Mariatroon near Ghent was founded by Isabel of Portugal, Duchess of Burgundy and wife of Philip the Good, while that of Marienbaum near Cologne was founded by his sister, Mary of Burgundy, Duchess of Cleves. See Nyberg, Tore (1965), *Birgittinische Klostergründungen des Mittelalters*, Lund, CWK Gleerup, 145-222; Sander Olsen, Ulla (2005), "The Birgittine Order in the Netherlands through 600 Years: An Overview", *Birgittiana* 19, 193-202.

<sup>9</sup> The Duke paid Georges Taxilly, prior of the Dominican convent of Bruges, for the purchase of two parchment books containing the *Revelations*. The only surviving manuscript contains the books VI, VII, VIII, the *Sermo Angelicus*, a *Passio Domini* attributed to Bridget, and the *Regula probationum revelationis*. It is therefore assumed that the first volume should contain the first five books. See Bousmanne, Bernard, Johan, Frédérique, Van Hoorebeek, Céline (2001), eds., *La Librairie des ducs de Bourgogne. Textes liturgiques, ascétiques, théologiques, philosophiques et moraux: Revelaciones Sanctae Brigidae*, Turnhout, Brepols.

During the 15th century the *Revelations* were widely and quickly translated into various European vernaculars; in southern Germany and in Flanders, where their spread was extensive, they were even translated in their entirety by the end of the century.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 2. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1424-1432, the Virgin in the inner panel, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Wikimedia Commons

Moreover, in the years of the Western Schism, for countries like Flanders, Bridget was the emblem of traditional Roman Catholicism.<sup>11</sup> Whereas elsewhere the *Revelations* were energetically fought and rejected, such as in France during the first years of the 15th century, they were defended and widely spread in the court of Burgundy.<sup>12</sup> It is no coincidence that the task of defending them was assigned to Heymericus de Campo, the greatest Burgundian theologian of the 15th century and advocate of the mystical charisms.<sup>13</sup> He is the author of the *Dyalogus Super Reuelacionibus Beate Birgitte*, the *defensorium* which dates back to the Council of Basel when Bridget's sanctity and orthodoxy were questioned.<sup>14</sup> He also founded the first Brigittine monastery in Brabant, at Mariënwater, in 1434.<sup>15</sup> As a court painter to Duke Philip the Good, Jan van Eyck could have known Heymericus de Campo, the duke's favorite theologian, to whom he tasked the founding of the University of Louvain in 1432. Heymericus de Campo's influence on the pictorial conceptions of the van Eyck brothers was recently pointed out<sup>16</sup>, while his role as one of the protagonists of the mediation between the *Revelations* and the work of the van Eyck brothers was mentioned for the first time in my Doctoral dissertation.

One of the most substantial aspects which testifies the centrality of Bridget's *Revelations* for the Ghent Altarpiece iconography is seen in the depiction of the Virgin. The aim of this article is to analyze the wide-range of Brigittine texts that explain the symbolic elements of the painting which are related to the iconography of the Virgin, to her physical and symbolic features and attributes, and to Marian dogmas, especially those of the Perpetual Virginity, the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption. The Marian themes are not the only ones inspired by the *Revelations* which were examined in my Doctoral dissertation. There are other texts that explain the fundamental themes of the altarpiece's iconography, all related to Brigittine

<sup>10</sup> In the last several years, the interest on the topic has gradually increased and has led to the organization of two conferences whose proceedings have been published. The first conference focused on Bridget's *Vitae*, while the second was related to the dissemination of her works. See Morris, Bridget, O'Mara Veronica (1999), eds., *The Lives of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in the Vernacular, Proceedings of the International Conference of Beverley-Hull July 1997*, Turnhout, Brepols and by the same editors *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars, Proceedings of the International Conference of Beverley-Hull July 1997*, Turnhout, Brepols.

<sup>11</sup> On the Roman obedience of the Belgian church, see De Moreau, Édouard (1949), *Histoire de l'Église en Belgique. L'Église aux Pays-Bas sous les ducs de Bourgogne et Charles-Quint (1378-1559)*, vol. 4, Bruxelles, L'Édition universelle, esp. 13-40.

<sup>12</sup> Vauchez, André (1999), *Saints, prophètes et visionnaires: le pouvoir surnaturel au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Albin Michel, 162-174.

<sup>13</sup> A pupil of Johannes de Nova Domo and master of Nicholas of Cusa, he was close to the realist movement. Heymeric was one of the most important Albertists of his time and an enthusiastic interpreter of the great Neoplatonic revival, a perspective that was also favored in Cologne, where the canonical academic path was accompanied by the studies of the mystics Eckhart, Suso and Tauler. See Black, Antony (1977), "The Realist Ecclesiology of Heymeric van de Velde", in Van Eijl, Edmond J. M., ed., *Facultas S. Theologiae Lovanensis 1432-1797. Bijdragen tot haar geschiedenis*, Leuven, University Press, 273-291.

<sup>14</sup> See Fredriksson Adman, Anna (2003), ed., *Heymericus de Campo. Dyalogus Super Reuelacionibus Beate Birgitte. A Critical Edition with an Introduction*, Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Already between the time of her death and the first years of the 15th century, Bridget was at the center of a dispute between supporters of the legality of her writings and those who criticized them. Everything is documented by a series of treaties written by accusers and apologists. For more, see the study by Claire Sahlin who systematically analyzed the oppositions to Bridget that occurred when the saint was still alive, during the canonization process and those that followed in the 15th century: Sahlin, Claire L. (1996), *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy. A Study of Gender and Religious Authority in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 136-220.

<sup>15</sup> See Nyberg 1965, pp. 179-195.

<sup>16</sup> See Schneider, Wolfgang Christian (2009), "Die Deesis des Genter Altars von Jan van Eyck und die Farbenspekulation des Heymericus des Campo", in Reinhardt, Klaus, ed., *Heymericus de Campo. Philosophie und Theologie im 15. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg, Roderer, 205-223 and in the same volume Schwaetzer, Harald, "Bunte Geometrie. Die Farben im Sigillum aeternitatis des Heymericus de Campo im Kontext von Malerei und Philosophie", 183-204.

social, political and spiritual ideas. Among them we quote: the Church as the mystical body of Christ; the re-establishment of the orthodox Eucharistic doctrine against the Hussite heresy; the political and papal power within the historical context of the Councils of Constance and Basel related to Flanders's infallible obedience to the Roman pontiff; and Bridget's social conception which matches with that of the donor, Jodocus Vijd. What emerges is a very complex context which places the *Revelations* of Saint Bridget among the main sources of the altarpiece's iconography not only with regard to the iconography of the Virgin.

## 2. The new iconography of the Virgin: the physical features according to the *Revelations*

The plethora of examples of Marian thematic connections between Brigittine literature and the Ghent Altarpiece starts with the interior panel depicting the enthroned Virgin Mary (Fig. 2), where we find the aspects related to her physical features and attributes such as the clothes, the crown, the precious stones and the book in her hands.

Until a few years ago, the only critical contribution examining Brigittine references in the Ghent Altarpiece was a note in Panofsky's *Early Netherlandish Painting*. It is based on an assessment by William Heckscher that the Virgin's crown is totally inspired by the text of *Revelations* I, 31.<sup>17</sup> Panofsky merely thought the assertion of his colleague to be probable and did not continue exploring further potential Brigittine references in the altarpiece. Nevertheless, he agrees with Heckscher that at least two elements are derived from Saint Bridget's *Revelations*: the choice of an unusual iconographic subject derived from a special source and the importance of the role played by Saint John the Baptist. However, *Rev* I, 31 also contains other important elements that help us to understand the altarpiece's iconography.

A brief preliminary iconographic analysis will be necessary before we take into deeper consideration the importance of the Brigittine texts in this representation of the Virgin. First of all, the Virgin in the Ghent Altarpiece does not match the iconography of the *Maria mediatrix* of the Last Judgement but rather, as has been observed, that of the *Regina coeli*.<sup>18</sup> In the iconographic tradition of the Last Judgment, Christ is typically flanked by the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist, like it is depicted in the Ghent Altarpiece (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1424-1432, the five upper panels of the interior, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Wikimedia Commons

<sup>17</sup> "The crown itself consists of a diadem adorned with naturalistically enameled flowers, all traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary: roses, lilies of the valley, columbines, and 'annunciation lilies'. Of these three are visible in their entirety and one in part, so that their total number may be assumed to be seven. Professor William S. Heckscher therefore believes, and I incline to agree, that the unusual image was suggested by a passage in St. Bridget's *Revelationes*, I, 31 [...] The passage is all the more relevant as the visionary also sees St. John the Baptist who explains to her the symbolical significance of the above-mentioned details.", Panofsky 1971, 'Note 220<sup>2</sup>', 448. The observation of Professor Heckscher is not accompanied by any bibliographic citation in the study of Panofsky. The comment comes in all probability from the exchanges between the two scholars since Heckscher was a student of Panofsky at the University of Hamburg.

<sup>18</sup> See Goodgal 1980, 299; Brand Philip 1980, 76.

But just as Panofsky points out, the one represented here is not a *deesis*, strictly speaking, for several reasons; Christ is not represented as the Son of Man but as the triune God, the Virgin Mary is not the *mediatrix* but the *Regina coeli* and John the Baptist is the *totius medius Trinitatis* as indicated in the complex inscription of the panel with his depiction.<sup>19</sup> Second, Mary is typically not depicted with the crown in any representation of the Last Judgment – she is usually represented with a crown in the iconography of the Coronation where the object is almost never placed on her head, and it is Christ or the entire Trinity who confer her the regal attribute.<sup>20</sup> The rare iconography of the “already crowned” Virgin was spread in Rome in the second half of the 12th century.<sup>21</sup> In a much more common tradition, that of the *Sedes sapientiae*, the Virgin often appears crowned but always with the Christ child on her lap.<sup>22</sup> In the altarpiece the Virgin holds a codex, the image which references the incarnate Word and which is certainly related to the Christ child, although it also suggests other meanings. Third, in the altarpiece, some physical features and gestures are brand new. In fact, what prevails here is the realism of the objects and the naturalism of movements, a clear rebuke to the rigidity of traditional iconographic models. Another element indicates a break with the past: her hair flowing to her shoulders, loose, blond-red and emanating a certain brightness, a feature which never appears until the first decades of the 15th century and which certainly derives from the *Revelations* of Saint Bridget.<sup>23</sup> Up until this point, depictions of Mary strictly featured a veil or, in some later ones, her hair pulled back and fastened by the crown or just visible under her mantle.

By comparing these different examples, some fundamental aspects emerge that signal the advancement of a new and original type of iconography. The representation of the Ghent Altarpiece is the first where the royal dignity of the Virgin is independent from the action of the Son. She appears already crowned and without the baby Jesus, and sits gloriously at the right hand of Christ, according to the iconography of the Coronation, and on the same level as John the Baptist, just as in the iconography of the Last Judgment. Carol Purtle’s analysis of the works of the van Eyck brothers in relation to many aspects of Marian devotion found in the liturgical and literary sources

of the time, is certainly a starting point. The Virgin, who symbolizes the Church, is a bride in a twofold sense, either at the moment of the Annunciation and of the Coronation, both episodes represented in the altarpiece.<sup>24</sup> But the aforementioned physical features, the realism of the objects and the naturalism of gestures suggest inspiration from some other source. The depiction of the Virgin is, in many respects, brand new and reveals how the symbolism of the 12th century has given way to the new demands of late medieval devotional and mystical literature.<sup>25</sup>

From the very first chapters of the Book I of the *Revelations*, the dominant theme, the coming of Christ foretold by the prophets for the salvation of mankind, is accompanied by a rich Marian reflection. In fact, the Virgin plays a decisive role throughout the Brigittine *corpus*. Always present in the visions relating to the judgements of souls, Mary is among the interlocutors of Bridget, together with Christ, God the Father and the saints. Long passages and many pages are devoted to describing her characteristics and privileges in which it is often Christ himself directly extolling the many high virtues of Mary to Bridget.

In addition to the richness of doctrinal themes and the most popular aspects of late medieval piety, there is one aspect of Bridget’s visionary language particularly worthy of attention: the detailed description of the appearance, clothes and accessories of the Virgin, that are matched with specific spiritual qualities. This feature is difficult to find in the literature of the time and is certainly an innovation. *Rev I*, 31 is only the first of a series of visions which deal with Marian symbolism. The rich allegorical meanings are explained by John the Baptist to Bridget<sup>26</sup>:

Videbat sponsa reginam celi, matrem Dei, habentem preciosam coronam inestimabilem in capite suo et capillos extensos super spatulas admirabilis pulchritudinis, tunicam auream splendore indicibili coruscantem et mantellum de azuro seu sereni celi coloris. Cumque de tam speciosa visione vehementer admiraretur sponsa et in tali admiratione tota staret quodam interno stupore suspensa, illico apparuit ei beatus Iohannes Baptista, qui ait illi: Audi diligenter, quid hoc notat!<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See Panofsky 1971, p. 220. For the inscriptions in the Ghent Altarpiece see Baets O. P., Jacques de (1961), *De gewijde teksten van het ‘Lam Gods’ Kritisch onderzocht*, Gent, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde.

<sup>20</sup> See Therel, Marie Louise (1984), *Le triomphe de la Vierge-Eglise. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques*, Paris, Ed. du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.

<sup>21</sup> There is at least one representation where the Virgin appears already crowned with a gem-studded tiara. This is the mosaic in the apse of the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, a work of art of particular ecclesial value. In this regard see Toubert, Hélène (1990), *Un art dirigé. Réforme grégorienne et Iconographie*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, esp. 37-56.

<sup>22</sup> Réau, Louis (1957), *Iconographie de l’Art Chrétien*, vol. 2/2, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 70-128, esp. 93-94; Lechner, Martin (1971), “Das Marienbild in der Kunst des Westens bis zum Konzil von Trient”, in Kirschbaum, Engelbert (1971), ed., *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie. Allgemeine Ikonographie*, vol. 3, Freiburg, Herder, coll. 182-184.

<sup>23</sup> Mary is represented for the first time without the veil and with the long blond hair in representations of the Nativity by Niccolò di Tommaso in Italy, based on the vision of the birth of Christ Bridget received in Bethlehem during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1372. See *Revelationes S. Brigittae VII*, 21 in Bergh, Birger (1967), ed., *Revelaciones. Book 7*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell. On Niccolò di Tommaso see Skaug, Erling S. (2001), “St Bridget’s vision of the Nativity and Nicolò di Tommaso’s late period”, *Arte Cristiana* 89, 195-209.

<sup>24</sup> Purtle, Carol Jean (1982), *The Marian paintings of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 37-38 and 152.

<sup>25</sup> For an introduction on the impact of Mariology on late medieval literary aspects and fine arts see Ellington, Donna Spivey (2001), *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul, Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press.

<sup>26</sup> Grantley McDonald has also identified this Brigittine passage as the source of the iconography of the Virgin, see McDonald 2015, 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> *Revelationes S. Brigittae I*, 31: “Qualiter sponsa videbat dulcissimam virginem Mariam corona et aliis ornamentis inestimabiliter decoratam et quomodo sponse sanctus Iohannes Baptista, quid per coronam etcetera designetur, declarant”. See Undhagen, Carl-Gustaf (1977), ed., *Revela-*

The crown, the cloak and the tunic indicate her titles of excellence:

Corona igitur notat, quod regina et domina est et mater regis angelorum. Capilli protensi, quod virgo est purissima et immaculata. Mantellum celi coloris, quod omnia temporalia erant ei quasi mortua. Tunica aurea notat, quod diuina caritate ardens et feruida fuit interius et exterius. In corona autem eius posuit filius eius septem lilia et inter hec lilia posuit septem lapides.<sup>28</sup>

To each lily corresponds a virtue:

Primum igitur lilium est eius humilitas, secundum timor, tercium obediencia, quartum paciencia, quintum stabilitas, sextum mititas, quia mitis est dare omnibus petentibus; septimum est misericordia in necessitatibus. In quacumque enim necessitate fuerit homo, si hanc toto corde inuocauerit, saluabitur.<sup>29</sup>

The same principle is applied to precious stones:

Inter hec fulgencia lilia posuit filius eius septem lapides preciosissimos. Primus lapis est virtuositas singularis, quia non est aliqua virtus in aliquo spiritu siue in corpore aliquo, qua ipsa hanc eandem virtutem non habeat excellencius. Secundus lapis est perfectissima mundicia, quia ista regina celi sic pura fuit, quod una macula peccati inueniri numquam potuit in ea a principio ingressus eius in mundum usque ad ultimam diem mortis ipsius. [...] Tercius lapis fuit pulchritudo eius, quia Deus de pulchritudine eiusdem matris sue iugiter laudatur a sanctis suis et gaudium sanctorum angelorum et omnium sanctarum animarum impletur ex pulchritudine eius. Quartus lapis preciosus corone est sapiencia eiusdem virginis matris, quia ipsa impleta est omni diuina sapiencia cum Deo et ex ea omnis impletur et perficitur sapiencia. Quintus lapis est fortitudo, quia ipsa sic est fortis cum Deo, quod omnia, quecumque creata et facta sunt, potest deprimere. Sextus eciam lapis est claritas eius, que sic clara est, quod angeli, qui habent oculos clariores luce, illuminantur ex ea et demones non audent respicere in claritatem eius. Septimus lapis est plenitudo omnis delectacionis et eciam spiritualis dulcedinis, que in ea sic plena est, quod non est aliquod gaudium, quod non augeatur ex ea, nulla de-

lectacio, que non plenior fit et perficiatur ex ea et ex eius visione beata, quia ipsa impleta et repleta est gracia ultra omnes sanctos.<sup>30</sup>

The details of the altarpiece consistently match Bridget's descriptions: there are seven lilies and seven precious stones, although these are placed under the lilies and not in between as indicated in the text of the vision; the shiny long hair flows to her shoulders; and the blue tunic is the color of the sky. Other symbolic flowers traditionally associated with the Virgin were also added to the depiction.<sup>31</sup> The crown is two tiered, thus allowing the artist to resolve the ambiguity in Bridget's description, who does not fully explain how the flowers and the stones may be depicted in a single tier. To facilitate this effect, he created a solid gold structure on which he set the fresh flowers, which is the distinguishing feature of the revelation, and he embellished the crown with pearls which give greater prominence to precious stones. The uniqueness of this representation has not been stressed enough (Fig. 4). Fresh flowers and precious stones do not appear in fact in any other example in figurative art. Each of the seven stones has a specific meaning and it would be interesting to investigate if, in order to identify them, the van Eycks were inspired by the text of *Rev IV*, 124 in which Saint Agnes places a crown with seven gemstones on Bridget's head:



Fig. 4. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The crown of the Virgin in the inner panel of the Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1424-1432, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Wikimedia Commons

Agnes loquitur ad sponsam Christi dicens: Veni, filia, et impone tibi coronam factam ex septem lapidibus preciosis. [...] Primus igitur lapis corone tue est iaspis [...] Secundus lapis est saphirus [...] Tercius lapis est smaragdus [...] Quartus lapis est margarita [...] Quintus lapis est topazius. [...] Sextus lapis est adamas. [...] Septimus lapis est carbunculus. [...].<sup>32</sup>

*ciones. Book I*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.

<sup>28</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae I*, 31.

<sup>29</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae I*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae I*, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Concerning the symbolism of plants and flowers in the works of the van Eycks, Lottlisa Behling has devoted to it a large space in her study. See Behling, Lottlisa (1957), *Die Pflanze in der mittelalterlichen Tafelmalerei*, Weimar, Böhlau, 44-52.

<sup>32</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae IV*, 124: "Quomodo beata Agnes imponebat sponse Christi coronam de septem lapidibus preciosis, scilicet paciencie in tribulacionibus". See Aili, Hans (1992), ed., *Revelaciones. Book 4*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.

The stones depicted correspond to the types listed above. The recognizable stones are the jasper on the proper right, followed by the emerald, the sapphire, the diamond, the topaz, the ruby, and another sapphire. If the order of the emerald and sapphire were reversed, the representation would follow strictly the description in the *Revelations*. Therefore, the repetition of the pearl in the crown and the inclusion of the seven stones mentioned in the text of *Rev IV*, 124 strengthens our hypothesis of a direct derivation from the Brigittine text. The twelve stars of the Apocalypse (Ap 12, 1) revolving around the crown are also depicted, eight of which are clearly visible while three can be glimpsed only behind the rays and the fresh flowers, and the twelfth is supposedly behind the crown where a group of two lilies and a rose are placed close together. The stars are not present in Bridget's description but the bond between the *Revelations* and the Apocalypse is very close, especially if we consider that the same gemstones mentioned by Bridget also appear in the last book of the Sacred Scripture (Ap 21, 9 and 21, 19-21). Here, among other things, the type of jasper is described as crystalline and is compared to the splendor of the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem where the doors are surrounded by pearls, just like in the Virgin's crown in the Ghent Altarpiece.

It should be noted that the Dominican Alain de la Roche, who was responsible for the popularization of the Rosary, was particularly attached to the figurative tradition of Ghent, a city where he resided for about two years, from 1468 to 1470. Johan Huizinga has already written about how a certain aesthetic attitude prevails in the Dominican visionary.<sup>33</sup> In the *Tractatus de Psalterio seu Rosario Christi et Mariae*, we find the same gemstones portrayed in the Ghent Altarpiece, however, there are more stones, 15, and their symbolism is even more complex.<sup>34</sup> Despite this, the vividness of the colors and the descriptions echo the painting and witness to a common sensitivity.

There are still some aspects of the representation of the Virgin that match the Brigittine text but which are not found in *Rev I*, 31. Rather, they are inspired by a revelation of the Book V, known as the *Liber questionum*.<sup>35</sup> The book itself is a long vision received by Bridget in Sweden which consists of sixteen *interrogaciones* divided into *questiones* and *responsiones* and interspersed with thirteen revelations. The protagonist is a learned monk who "skillfully exposes the most inexplicable aspects of Christian theodicy"<sup>36</sup>. In Book V, Bridget attacks the arrogance of the intellectuals and the use of knowledge as an end in itself. The monk's scholastic knowledge is juxtaposed with the true wisdom of Bridget, who is the instrument of the Holy Spirit, and who opposes the monk's skepticism towards the Incarnation with praise of the Virgin body. *Rev V*, 4 speaks of some physical and spiritual characteristics of the Virgin

Mary that correspond exactly to the representation in the altarpiece. The elements of *Rev V*, 4 that inspired the representation of Mary are: the shining hair, the white forehead and its light tint, the pinkish cheeks, the inclination of the neck and the designation of the chest and belly as "full of virtue". Each of these physical features corresponds to one of the spiritual qualities of the Virgin. This time, the whole head emanates a shining light that is depicted in the painting with light beams:

Caput quippe tuum fuit quasi aurum fulgens et capilli quasi radii solis, quia tua mundissima virginitas, que est in te quasi caput omnium virtutum, et continencia omnium illicitorum motuum placuerunt et fulserunt in conspectu meo cum omni humilitate. Ideo merito vocaris coronata regina super omnia, que creata sunt; regina propter mundiciam, coronata propter excellentem dignitatem.<sup>37</sup>



Fig. 5. Jan van Eyck, *Annunciation*, c. 1433-1435, National Gallery, Washington. Image: Wikimedia Commons

The lightly-tinted forehead is a symbol of the delicacy of conscience: "Frons tua fuit incomparabilis albedinis, significans verecundiam consciencie tue, in qua plenitudo est humane sciencie et dulcedo diuine sapiencie lucet in ea super omnes". Her cheeks symbolize the meritorious deeds and the nature of the Virgin:

Gene tue fuerunt de optimo colore, scilicet albo et rubicundo, quia fama operum tuorum laudabilium et pulchritudo morum tuorum

<sup>33</sup> Huizinga, Johan (1922), *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, London, Penguin Books, 209.

<sup>34</sup> See Paola, Roberto (2006), *Il salterio di Gesù e di Maria: genesi, storia e rivelazioni del santissimo rosario*, Conegliano, Ancilla.

<sup>35</sup> See Bergh, Birger (1971), *Revelaciones. Book 5: Liber questionum*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell.

<sup>36</sup> Borresen, Kari Elisabeth (1993), *Le Madri della Chiesa. Il Medioevo*, Napoli, M. D'Auria Editore, 59 (mytranslation).

<sup>37</sup> *Reuelaciones S. Brigittae V*, 4: "Reuelacio quarta in libro questionum, in qua Christus pulcherrime laudat omnia membra virginis Marie matris sue, moralizans dicta membra spiritualiter, comparando ea virtutibus, et pronunciat eandem virginem dignissimam esse reginali corona".

placuerunt michi, quibus cotidie inflammabar. Vere ex pulchritudine morum tuorum gaudebat Deus Pater meus et numquam auertit oculos suos a te, et ex caritate tua omnes optinuerunt caritatem.<sup>38</sup>

The inclined neck and the head symbolize the attitude to accomplish God's will:

Collum tuum est nobiliter erectum et pulcherrime eleuatum, quia iusticia anime tue plene est erecta ad me et secundum velle meum mobilis, quia numquam inclinata fuit ad aliquod malum superbie. Sicut enim collum curuatur cum capite, sic omnis intencio et operacio tua flectitur ad voluntatem meam.<sup>39</sup>

The praise of the bodily limbs of the Virgin has its roots in the practice known as the *salutatio membrorum*, which dates back to Saint Bridget and spread in Flanders especially with the modern devotion. As Giovanni Pozzi has suggested:

the prayer represents [...] a well-known devotional practice, the "salutatio membrorum", which passed in review, from head to foot, the members of Mary giving each its praise. A long draft is traced back to Saint Bridget; it was widely practiced in the circles of modern devotion and is still found in the manuals of piety of the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup>

Just as in the crown the virtues of the Virgin were expressed through the symbolism of precious stones, the same principle is applied to those depicted in the chest and womb. The beautiful blue dress is thus characterized by a border rich in pearls and gems, while a bunch of precious stones hang from a cord near the womb:

Pectus tuum plenum fuit omni virtutum suavitate in tantum, quod non est bonum in me, quod non sit in te, quia traxisti omne bonum in te ex morum tuorum dulcedine, quando deitati mee placuit intrare ad te et humanitati mee habitare tecum et bibere lac mamillarum tuarum. [...] Venter tuus fuit mundissimus sicut ebur et sicut locus ex virtuosissimis lapidibus splendidissimus, quia constancia consciencie tue et fidei numquam tepuit sed nec in tribulatione potuit viciari.<sup>41</sup>

Another element should be read as a reference to the Incarnation: the "corporal" hands of the Virgin touching

the green cloth with which she holds the book symbolizing the Word: "Ideo corporales manus tue tractauerunt humanitatem meam et quietus fui inter brachia tua cum deitate mea"<sup>42</sup>. The book's square shape and color allude to the Earth and the green cloth recalls the Incarnation.



Fig. 6. Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434, National Gallery, London. Image: Wikimedia Commons

Another squared element usually occurs in scenes depicting the Annunciation: the crimson red pillow, which is present, for instance, in the *Annunciation* (Fig. 5) and in *The Arnolfini Portrait* by Jan van Eyck (Fig. 6), just to cite a few examples of this symbolic detail that was very popular at that time.<sup>43</sup> But the square cushion is represented in a different way in the *Annunciation* of the *Hours of Etienne Chevalier*, a masterpiece of another great artist, Jean Fouquet (Fig. 7). Instead of a red cushion, it is represented as the square green canopy inside the gold chandelier, whose circular shape alludes to the celestial sphere. The erudite image suggests that with the Incarnation of God, the unions between heaven and earth and between the human and the divine took place. The Virgin is represented as the new ark of the covenant, the latter being represented in the apse of the Church. She is sitting on a carpet with a green border that recalls the same meaning of the canopy, for it is in her that the

<sup>38</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* V, 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* V, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Pozzi, Giovanni (1993), *Sull'orlo del visibile parlare*, Milano, Adelphi, 26 (my translation).

<sup>41</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* V, 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* V, 4.

<sup>43</sup> On the Washington *Annunciation*, Ward focuses on the stool which recalls Isaiah 66, 1 ('Caelum thronus meus, terra autem scabellum pedum meorum'), see Ward, John L. (1975), "Hidden Symbolism in Jan van Eyck's Annunciations", *The Art Bulletin* 57, 197-220 while Zuzana Šebková-Thaller recognizes the red squared pillow as a symbol of the Incarnation: Šebková-Thaller, Zuzana (1992), *Sünde und Versöhnung in Jan van Eycks Hochzeitsbild. Die allegorische und anagogische Ebene des vierfachen Bildsinns*, Markt Berolzheim, Hernoul-le-Fin, 5.



Word became flesh, giving birth to the new and everlasting covenant.<sup>44</sup>

The theme of Mary's motherhood brings us back to that of her sacred womb. In female mystical literature, an extraordinary importance is attributed to Mary's womb which is conceived as a vase. The image used in the literature of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries is also found in the *Revelations*: "Tu me, que eram vas terrenum, dignatione tua sanctificasti."<sup>45</sup> It soon gained Eucharistic meanings that attached a sacramental value to the body of the Virgin.<sup>46</sup> The idea of Mary as the 'perfect body' is not new, but rather is found in other mystics such as Hildegard of Bingen and Gertrude of Helfta:



Fig. 7. Jean Fouquet, Annunciation, Heures d'Étienne Chevalier, c. 1450, Musée Condé, Chantilly. Image: Wikimedia Commons

...in the mental and symbolic universe of medieval female mystics, Mary is not a woman identified concretely and psychologically. She is, first of all, "the most lovable dwelling"

where, as Gertrude the Great says, the body of God can inhabit. The Mother is the land, the plowed field, the womb, the breast. [...] Mary is the instrument symphonizatus by the Holy Spirit: the visionary can only hear the sound or catch a glimpse of her auroral brightness [...] The idea of an absolute beauty dominates, as a sign of human perfection realized in foeminea forma, that nothing can corrupt or alter.<sup>47</sup>

It is glaringly obvious that the vagueness of previous texts differs significantly from the Brigittine literature. For example, in the vision of Gertrude of Helfta, the excessive brightness does not distinguish any identifying color or even the shape of the mother's womb. Instead, in Bridget's description the situation is completely different: the gemstones, centrally located on the body of the Virgin, are described to the smallest detail; the type of flower which appears in the vision can be easily and exactly located; the colors are vibrant and defined. Bridget's vision describes a precise figure and concrete objects that, thanks to their descriptive evidence, lend themselves to representation. The resulting mental image is clear and can be easily painted. The Brigittine visionary language stands for a descriptive accuracy of detail which is not found in earlier mystics. It is no longer enough to only imagine an "auroral brightness". In Bridget's visions, Mary is not defined by abstract concepts, but she appears in the concreteness of her physical features, in her human reality, as well as in a spiritual reality. This visual strength finds its transcription in the Ghent Altarpiece, which would be inconceivable without this literature. Where the text doesn't translate well to physical depictions of the Virgin, such as the descriptions of her virtues, these are replaced by symbolic objects like precious stones, flowers, and specific colors, now described in Bridget's writings with a realism that is not found in earlier texts.

Much of this attitude of the need to visualize started with the meditation on the evangelical episodes. Bridget was a sort of champion for the devotees and, above all, for the artists who were eager for detailed descriptions that could inspire them in the representation of the characters of sacred history.<sup>48</sup> This is further confirmed by Bridget's attitude towards her writings, which contributes to their attractiveness over those of other medieval mystics. As pointed out by Kari Børresen, Bridget was distinguished by a strong awareness, as a revelatory instrument of the Holy Spirit, she felt invested not only with a special historical and ecclesial mission as prophetess and reformer of her time, but also at the same level

<sup>44</sup> The *Annunciation* is located inside the holy chapel of Bourges. The angel Gabriel is kneeling in front of the Virgin who listens while the dove of the Holy Spirit hovers over her. Mary sits on the floor on a carpet between two books, one closed, the other open, symbols, respectively, of the Old and New Testaments. Fouquet inscribed them in the vanishing lines which all converge towards the statue of Moses holding the Tablets of the Law, behind the altar, surmounted by an enormous shrine that we assume to be the ark of the Covenant. See Reynaud, Nicole (2006), *Jean Fouquet. Les Heures d'Étienne Chevalier*, Dijon, Faton, 54-59.

<sup>45</sup> See *Revelationes S. Brigittae* I, 5.

<sup>46</sup> Bartolomei Romagnoli, 423-424. For Mary as 'tabernacle' see the study of Giovanni Pozzi: Pozzi 1993, 17-88. Additional reflections can be found in other studies related to the sacramental value of the representations of Marian subject in which the Virgin is considered as the tabernacle or the container of the Eucharist, especially in the depictions of the Enthroned Madonna, in the Annunciations and the Nativities of Flemish masters of the first and second generation. See Lane, Barbara G. (1984) *The Altar and the Altarpiece. Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting*, New York, Harper & Row, esp. 1-77.

<sup>47</sup> Bartolomei Romagnoli 2013, 421-423 (my translation).

<sup>48</sup> See Fulton, Rachel (1996), "Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs", *Viator* 27, 85-116.

of the evangelists in telling the episodes and truths that are revealed to her in her visions:

Outstanding is the view that Bridget has of herself as God's instrument, inspired by Him, with the purpose of a divine revelation that unfolds continuously [...] Unlike Bridget, Hildegard and Julian do not consider themselves as instruments on the same level of the prophets, the apostles and evangelists; their mission is not to reveal new knowledge.<sup>49</sup>



Fig. 8. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin in the external panel of the Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1424-1432, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Wikipedia Commons

This freedom of expression can also be found in the way in which Bridget takes a position on some vital doctrinal questions concerning the Virgin on which medieval theologians had long disputed.

### 3. Marian dogmas according to Saint Bridget reflected in the Ghent Altarpiece

Some of the Marian symbols used by Bridget are present not only in the internal panel of the altarpiece depicting the Virgin, but also in the external ones of the Annunciation where her primary role is evident (Fig. 8). The iconographic details of the half-full jug of water and the light reflecting the shapes of two windows on the wall are related to the Virgin (Fig. 9). The symbolic interpretation of the jug and the light has been linked more than once to the hymn of Bernard of Clairvaux which equates the virginity of Mary, which was kept intact, to an image of a ray of light that passes through glass without damaging it.<sup>50</sup> As Meiss observed, the image is also found in the *Revelations* of Saint Bridget. This is taken from chapter 1 of Book I:

Ego sum creator celi et terre, unus in deitate cum Patre et Spiritu sancto, ego, qui prophetis et patriarchis loquebar et quem ipsi expectabant. Ob quorum desiderium et iuxta promissionem meam assumpsi carnem sine peccato et concupiscencia ingrediens viscera virginea tamquam sol splendens per lapidem mundissimum. Quia sicut sol vitrum ingrediendo non ledit, sic nec virginitas Virginis in assumptione humanitatis mee corrupta est.<sup>51</sup>

The text that inspires this iconographic subject is not only *Rev* I, 1, but also *Rev* V, 4 which was quoted in the above description of the physical qualities of the Virgin. The *Liber questionum* is even more important for our theme because the Brigittine idea of the Incarnation as a response to Mary's ardent love for God is formulated for the first time.<sup>52</sup> The concept, additionally reaffirmed and developed in the *Sermo Angelicus*<sup>53</sup>, one of Bridget's most popular writings, most likely inspired the representation of the Virgin in the temple of the *Mystical Nativity* in the Isenheim Altarpiece by

<sup>49</sup> Børresen 1993, 149. The idea that the *Revelations* is on the same level as the biblical passages was formulated by Alfonso of Jaén and is found in the proceedings of the canonization process. See Jönsson, Arne (1989), *Alfonso of Jaén. His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Servi Christi*, Lund, Lund University Press, 177-178.

<sup>50</sup> Purtle 1982, 33; Meiss 1945, 43-68; Panofsky 1971, 144. "Sicut splendor solis vitrum absque laesione perfundit et penetrare eiusque soliditatem insensibili subtilitate pertraicit nec cum ingreditur, violat nec, cum egredietur, dissipat: sic Dei verbum, splendor Patris, virginum habitaculum adiit et inde clauso utero prodiit", (Salzer, Anselm (1893), *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters*, Seitenstetten, Selbstverl. des k. k. Ober-Gymnasiums, 74).

<sup>51</sup> *Revelationes S. Brigittae* I, 1: "Incipit liber celestis reuelacionum Dei primus. Verba Domini nostri Iesu Christi ad suam electam sponsam dilectissimam de certificatione sue excellentissime incarnationis et de improbacione prophanacionis et fraccionis fidei nostre et baptismi et qualiter ad sui dileccionem inuitat prefatam dilectam sponsam".

<sup>52</sup> *Revelationes S. Brigittae* V, int. 9: "Quando enim ignis amoris diuini, qui in se incommutabilis et eternus est, accendi et apparere cepit et deitas incarnari voluit, nulla creatura ad hunc ignem amoris percipiendum habilior et efficacior erat quam virgo Maria, quia nulla creatura tanta caritate arsit sicut ipsa".

<sup>53</sup> *Revelationes S. Brigittae SA, Incipit*: "O Maria, virgo purissima et fecundissima mater, hoc [ignis] ipsum tu es! Sic namque et talis ab eterno diuino aspectui increata astitisti ac deinde de supradictis tam puris et claris elementis materiam tui benedicti corporis habuisti. Talis vtique coram Deo ante creacionem tuam increata assistebas, qualis postmodum effici meruisti, et ideo a principio omnia creanda in Dei conspectu ad eius maximum gaudium plurimum exellebas". See Eklund, Sten (1972), ed., *Opera minora. II, Sermo angelicus*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell.

Matthias Grünewald.<sup>54</sup> In the fourth revelation of the *Liber questionum*, the Virgin's ears are compared to two splendid windows open to listening: "Aures tue fuerunt mundissime et aperte tamquam fenestre pulcherrime, quando protulit tibi Gabriel velle meum et quando ego Deus factus sum in te caro."<sup>55</sup>

According to Purtle, the room behind the Virgin where the reflection of the two windows is represented symbolizes the thalamus and the jug is the image for Mary's womb.<sup>56</sup> But in the altarpiece, there is also the reflection of a third window that projects onto the wall, near the bifora of the room behind Mary. In it there are sculptural elements that repeat the number three and that should be read in reference to the Trinitarian mystery, to which, according to Bridget, the Virgin participates in an exceptional way. From the first chapter of Book I, it is emphasized that when Christ assumed the human nature, he was in no way separated from his divinity:

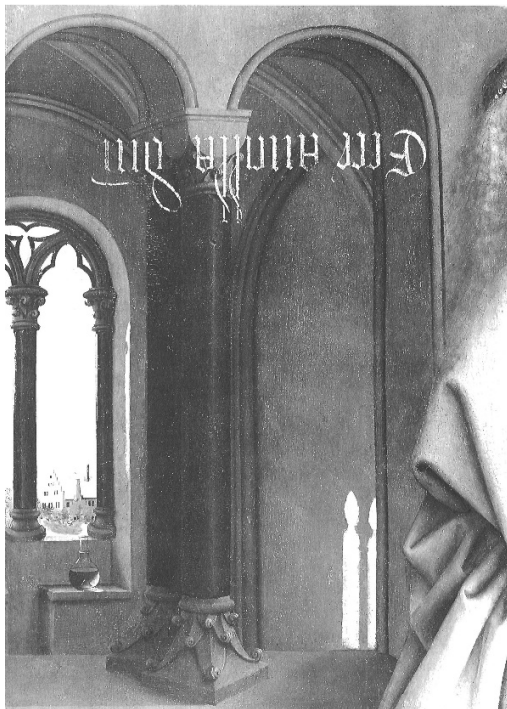


Fig. 9. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The room in the external panel of the Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1424-1432, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Purtle Carol, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, fig. 22

Ego autem sic assumpsi carnem, ut non derelinquerem deitatem. Et non minor eram in deitate cum Patre et Spiritu sancto omnia regens

et implens, licet in utero virginis essem cum humanitate. Quia sicut splendor numquam separatur ab igne, sic deitas mea numquam ab humanitate separata est nec in morte.<sup>57</sup>

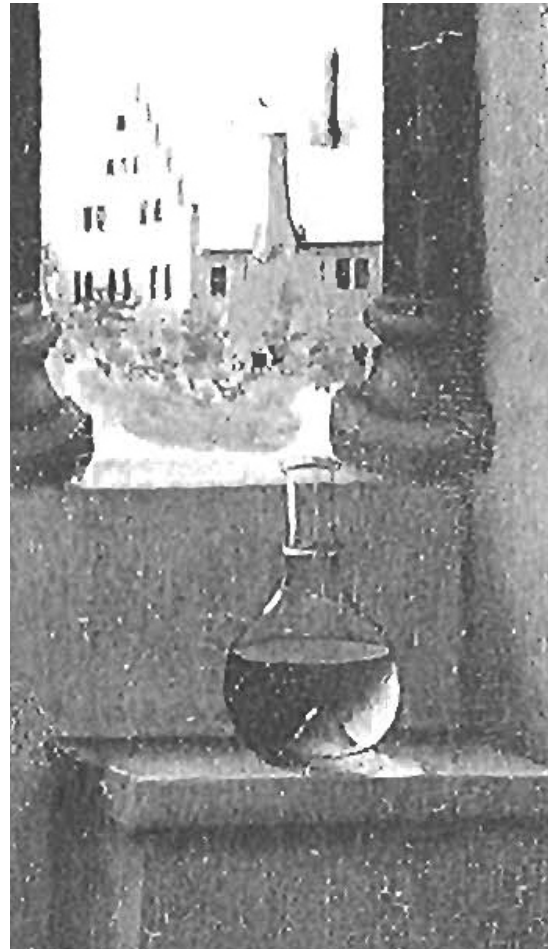


Fig. 10. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *The carafe in the external panel of the Ghent Altarpiece*, c. 1424-1432, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Purtle Carol, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, fig. 22

The detail of the carafe can be explained instead through Rev V, 13. Despite Meiss' identification of the pitcher as a reference to Mary's virginity *ante* and *post partum*, he didn't explain the reason why it is only half full. While transparency and material (i.e. glass) are easily traceable to the dogma of Mary's virginal conception, other aspects of the representation are not immediately clear. It hasn't yet been satisfactorily explained why there is water in it, why the carafe features a tapered neck yet remains open, and what the play of light and

<sup>54</sup> Ritchie, Jennifer Ann (2000), *The Nativity Panel of Isenheim Altarpiece and its relationship to the Sermo Angelicus of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, thesis in Master of Arts (Art History), University of North Texas. An important testimony of Marian devotion in the late Middle Ages, nourished by popular devotions and doctrinal notions, the *Sermo Angelicus de Virginis excellentia* contains the readings of the day for the Brigittine order. Drafted in Rome between 1350 and 1354, the eleventh book of the *Revelations* is a collection of Marian texts to be read in the morning, together with the so-called *Cantus Sororum*. The *Sermo Angelicus* was, in all probability, the most famous book of Bridget and the first to be translated into European vernacular languages already from the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. See Eklund, Sten (1972), *Opera minora. II. Sermo angelicus*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell; Montag, Ulrich (2000), "The Reception of St. Birgitta in Germany", in Morris, O'Mara, 106-116.

<sup>55</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* V, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Purtle 1982, 33.

<sup>57</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* I, 1.

shadow represents (Fig. 10).<sup>58</sup> Carla Gottlieb believes that the jug is a symbol of the Immaculate Conception<sup>59</sup>, but we believe that *Rev V*, 13 is the text that explains the reason to this statement since here the reference to the Marian dogmas is explicit:

In primo loco fuit vas clausum et non clausum, vas paruum et non paruum, vas luminosum et non luminosum, vas vacuum et non vacuum, vas mundum et non mundum [...] Pater loquitur: “Vas illud, de quo dixit tibi, Maria filia Ioachim, mater humanitatis Christi fuit. Ipsa enim fuit vas clausum et non clausum: clausum dyabolo sed non Deo [...] Secundo fuit Maria, mater filii mei, vas paruum et non paruum: paruum et modicum in humilitatis sue contemptu, magnum et non paruum in caritate deitatis mee. Tercio fuit Maria vas vacuum et non vacuum: vacuum ab omni voluptate et peccato, non vacuum sed plenum celesti dulcedine et omni bonitate. Quarto fuit Maria vas luminosum et non luminosum: luminosum, quia omnis anima pulchra a mea creata est, sed anima Marie creuit ad omnem perfectionem luminis in tantum, quod filius meus fixit se in anima eius, ex cuius pulchritudine gaudebat celum et terra. Sed vas istud non luminosum fuit apud homines, quia mundi honores et diuicias contempnebat. Quinto Maria fuit vas mundum et non mundum: mundum vero fuit quia tota pulchra, et tanta immundicia non inueniebatur in ea, vbi cuspis acus infingeretur; sed non mundum fuit, quia de radice Ade processit et de peccatoribus nata est, licet sine peccato concepta, vt filius meus de ea sine peccato nasceretur.”<sup>60</sup>

The half-filled carafe, both light and dark at the same time, is an element of *Rev V*, 13 playing on the opposites of full/empty, bright/overshadowed, pure/impure. As usual in the *Revelations*, the text is full of Marian themes, but one in particular is worthy of attention,

namely the question of the Immaculate Conception. While, as we have seen elsewhere, and in particular in Book I and VI of the *Revelations*, Bridget unwaveringly describes the spotless conception of Mary, there simultaneously exists a certain ambiguity. Bridget states that the Virgin Mary was conceived without sin, but, coming from the seed of Adam, she retained an aspect of impurity. This wouldn't have had any effect on her because her status as Mother of God made her the beneficiary of a special grace coming from the Spirit of God that “filled” her.<sup>61</sup> The *chiaroscuro* effect in the representation of the jar thus seems to be an erudite allusion to the reflection on the conception of the Virgin without sin, but with the nuanced meaning expressed in this Brigittine passage.

The meaning of the representation lies in the ongoing debate about the Immaculate Conception in the Middle Ages which was started by Paschasius Radbertus and Ratramno in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. As stated by Kari Børresen, there are two reasons for the special conception of Mary: the lack of libido by her parents and the exemption from original sin at the time of the infusion of the soul. However, Bridget's position on the theme is contradictory as on one hand she follows the Franciscan tradition that was based on the theories of Galen, but on the other she also follows the Thomist one that was based on Aristotle. For this reason, in the *Revelations*, the lack of libido in the parents of the Virgin is indicated as the solution to the problem of the transmission of original sin that, according to the Thomist embryogenesis, was passed by both the paternal and maternal seed. Thus, there is a difference between Bridget and the Franciscan position: “Bridget does not teach a prior sanctification of Mary at the moment of her conception in the sense that does Duns Scotus.”<sup>62</sup> The carafe, signifying the Immaculate Conception, is also found in other paintings by Jan van Eyck, in the *Lucca Madonna* and in the *Ince Hall Madonna*<sup>63</sup> and also in the *Werl Altarpiece* by Robert Campin, a painting that was a source of inspiration for van Eyck. That representation is further evidence that Robert Campin also drew upon the *Revelations*.<sup>64</sup>

Carol Purtle, who linked the Office of Assumption of the Virgin to the altarpiece's iconography, underlined

<sup>58</sup> For another interpretation see Madigan, Brian Christopher (1984), “Van Eyck's Illuminated Carafe”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 49, 227-230.

<sup>59</sup> Gottlieb, Carla (1970), “‘En ipse stat post parietem nostrum’. The Symbolism of the Ghent Annunciation”, *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 19, 92-94.

<sup>60</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae V*, int. 13.

<sup>61</sup> See *Reuelationes S. Brigittae I*, 9: “Verba regine celi ad dilectam de amore dulcissimo, quem Filius habuit ad matrem virginem, et qualiter ex coniugio castissimo Christi mater fuerit concepta et in utero sanctificata, et qualiter assumpta fuerit in corpore et anima in celum, et de eius nominis virtutibus et de angelis bono et malo, hominibus deputatis”; *Reuelationes S. Brigittae VI*, 49: “Mater Dei notificat certitudinem, qualiter ipsa concepta fuit ex precepto diuine obediencie a parentibus sine aliquo peccato originali”; *Reuelationes S. Brigittae VI*, 55: “Mater Dei dicit, quod bene potest vocari aurea hora illa, in qua ipsa a parentibus concepta fuit. Qui plus hoc fecerunt ex obediencia diuina quam voluntate propria, et plus operata est ibi caritas diuina quam voluptas carnis. Sed voluit Deus, quod conceptionis modus non statim omnibus notus esset, donec veritas claresceret tempore preordinato”. See Bergh, Birger (1991), *Reuelationes Book 6*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.

<sup>62</sup> See Børresen 1993, 173-176. For a general introduction see Cecchin, Stefano M. (2005), ed., *La scuola francescana e l'Immacolata Concezione*, Atti del congresso mariologico francescano (S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi, 4-8 dicembre 2003), Città del Vaticano, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis; Horst, Ulrich (1987), *Die Diskussion um die Immacolata Conceptio im Dominikanerorden: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der theologischen Methode*, Paderborn, F. Schöningh; Gay-Canton, Réjane (2011), *Entre dévotion et Théologie scolastique. Réceptions de la controverse médiévale autour de L'Immaculée Conception en pays germaniques*, Tournout, Brepols.

<sup>63</sup> See Purtle 1982, 154.

<sup>64</sup> Robert Campin's acquaintance with the *Revelations* is not new since it has been proposed that he was inspired by them in the realization of more than one work of art such as the Dijon *Nativity* and the small votive images representing the *Virgin in the Apse*. See Meiss 1945, 175-181; Westcott 1992, 32-41.

that the verses from the book of Wisdom (Wis 7, 26-29), which are in the offices, were used more than once by Jan van Eyck in his paintings.<sup>65</sup> We find these verses in the inner panel depicting the Virgin Mary, in the inscription crowning her beautiful figure (Fig. 11). In this regard, Meiss focused again more on the *ante* and *post partum* virginity of Mary, while no one seems to have noticed the fact that the quotation of verses from the book of Wisdom must be connected directly to the Immaculist doctrine. The reference to the Immaculate Conception of Mary is evident: *speculum sine macula Dei*. The verse is repeated in full in other works of Jan van Eyck and represents a *manifesto* of the Flemish Mariology. In fact, it is found on the right side of the frame of the central panel of the triptych representing the *Madonna with Child, Saint Catherine, Saint Michael and a donor*, and in the edge of the robe of the Virgin in the painting *The Virgin in the Cathedral*. Through a more careful analysis, we find that the verse is perfectly in line with the text of *Rev I, 42* in which the Virgin is referred to as the ‘mirror of Trinity’:



Fig. 11. Hubert and Jan van Eyck, Detail of the inscription of the inner panel with the Virgin of the Ghent Altarpiece, c. 1424-1432, Sint-Baafskathedraal, Ghent. Image: Wikimedia Commons

Mater loquebatur: “Ego habui tria, quibus placui filio meo: humilitatem, ut nulla creatura, nec angelus nec homo, esset me humilior; secundo habui obedienciam, qua studui obedire filio meo in omnibus; tercio habui precipuum caritatem. [...] Tercio pro caritate sic appropinquat Deus michi, quod, qui videt Deum, videt me, et qui videt me, deitatem et humanitatem videre potest in me quasi in speculo et me in Deo. Quicumque enim videt Deum, videt in eo tres personas, et quicumque videt me, videt quasi tres personas. [...] Anima et corpus meum puriora sunt sole et mundiora speculo. Unde, sicut in speculo viderentur tres persone, si astarent, sic in puritate mea videri potest Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus. Ego enim habui filium in utero meo cum deitate.”<sup>66</sup>

But, the highest point of Flemish Mariology inspired by the *Revelations* of Saint Bridget, is achieved in the representation of the assumption of Mary. The representation of the Virgin derives from the *Revelations*, where it is said that she is raised body and soul next to the throne of God: “Tu autem, carissima mater mea, anima tua assumpta fuit super omnes choros angelorum ad thronum Dei et cum ea est mundissimum corpus tuum.”<sup>67</sup> The concept is further developed in the *Revelations*:

Deinde completo cursu vite mee, primo animam meam, quia ipsa domina erat corporis, ad deitatem excellencius ceteris eleuauit, inde corpus meum, ut nullius creature corpus sit tam propinquum Deo sicut meum. Ecce quantum filius meus dilexit animam meam et corpus! Sed aliqui sunt, qui maligno spiritu negant me assumptam corpore et anima, aliqui etiam, qui nesciunt melius. Sed ista est pro certissimo rei veritas, quod cum corpore et anima ad deitatem assumpta sum.<sup>68</sup>

In the medieval Mariological tradition, the doctrine of the assumption of the Virgin into heaven, first in the soul and then in the body, had many supporters. Bridget also shared this position, stating that the body of the Virgin was assumed into heaven fifteen days after her death.<sup>69</sup> But in the dispute over her position in heaven, she also supported the thesis, sustained by St. Bonaventure, that the Virgin, once assumed body and soul in heaven, had been raised to the level of the Trinity.<sup>70</sup> Although this Marian privilege, which had its foundation in the narration of numerous Greek-Byz-

<sup>65</sup> Purtle 1982,

<sup>66</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* I, 42.

<sup>67</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* I, 51.

<sup>68</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* I, 9

<sup>69</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae* VI, 62: Quindecim vero diebus corpus meum iacuit sepultum in terra. Deinde cum multitudine angelorum fuit assumptum in celum.

<sup>70</sup> For a further analysis see Gastaldelli, Ferruccio (2004), “Una mariologia d’avanguardia nel secolo XII. Immacolata Concezione e assunzione corporea di Maria secondo Goffredo d’Auxerre”, in Piastra Clelia Maria and Santi, Francesco (2004), eds., *Figure poetiche e figure teologiche nella mariologia dei secoli XI e XII*, Atti del II Convegno mariologico della Fondazione Ezio Franceschini con la collaborazione della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma (Parma, 19-20 maggio 2000), Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 61-107.

antine apocryphal texts from the 6th century, had not been officially recognized and was at the center of a vigorous theological debate, it found a convinced adhesion in the *sensus fidelium*, especially in the artistic representations.<sup>71</sup>

In the *Incipit* of the *Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, the VIII book of the *Revelations*, the Queen of Heaven is seated next to the throne of God with her grandiose crown and her whole figure depicted in enchanting splendor. The setting of the five panels of the upper level of the altarpiece is a palace where the Deity, the Virgin and John the Baptist are sitting. A clear blue sky is depicted as well as the angels who give praise with songs, hymns and instruments. Everything corresponds to the Brigittine description:

Vidi palacium grande incomprehensibile magnitudine simile celo sereno [...] In palacio vero vidi thronum mirabilem, in quo sedebat quasi vnus homo fulgencior sole incomprehensibilis pulcritudinis et immense potencie dominus, cuius splendor erat incomprehensibilis in longitudine et profunditate et latitudine. Virgo autem quedam stabat iuxta sedem throni mirabili fulgore coruscans, habens in capite preciosam coronam. Et omnes illi assistentes seruiebant sedenti in throno, laudantes eum in hymnis et canticis et honorabant illam virginem reuerenter vt reginam celorum. Ille igitur qui sedebat in throno voce honestissima dixit michi: “Ego sum creator celi et terre, vnus cum patre et spiritu sancto verus deus, quia deus est pater, deus filius, deus spiritus sanctus, non tres dii sed tres persone et vnus deus. Nunc autem querere poteris: Si tres sunt persone, quare non tres dii? Respondeo tibi, quod deus est ipsa potencia, ipsa sapiencia, ipsa bonitas.”<sup>72</sup>

The text is the inspiring source of the representation of the Divinity seated on the throne in the central panel and affirms her Trinitarian dimension. Consequently, we can consider the representation of the Ghent Altarpiece as that of the Virgin raised body and soul to the level of God-Trinity.

#### 4. Conclusion

In summary, this article suggests that the *Revelations* were essential for the creation of a new iconography of the Virgin for the Flemish art of the first decades of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, since it drastically changed. Significantly,

the works of the founding masters of Flemish art demonstrate these changes – the very bright long blond/red hair that falls on her shoulders, the inclined face and neck, the clear skin and the pink cheeks – and are indicative of a wide-spread adaptation of new iconographic elements, linked to the positive cultural reception of Bridget’s mystical works. From that moment on, the new Marian iconography definitively imposed itself in the figurative scene of Northern Europe and later became the norm in Western art.

All this would have been unimaginable without the sensitivity of Flanders to female mysticism. Siding with Bridget at that time served not only to reinforce obedience to the Roman papacy, but to endorse the great tradition of mysticism and female prophecy, a type of language through which the intellectual and spiritual self-awareness of the country had expressed itself in the final medieval centuries.

The books in which Marian revelations are mainly located are Book I, the *Liber Questionum* and the *Sermo Angelicus*. These are texts in which there is a rich doctrinal reflection, presented in a narrative that provides a variety of useful materials from an iconographic point of view. The two representations of the Virgin in the Ghent Altarpiece communicate in this respect with one another not only in the physical depiction of the Virgin, represented with the long blond hair in both panels, but also in the objects that symbolize her spiritual qualities and privileges as Mother of God. A certain correspondence between the inscriptions in the altarpiece and the *Revelations* was also noted.

All four Marian dogmas are strongly supported in the *Revelations* but not without some theological reflections which testify to the debates of Bridget’s time and which found a solution only recently with the official proclamation by the Catholic Church of the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption. In works of art created in those territories where the loyalty to the Roman papacy was more solid, such as in the Belgian church, it is also easier to find a greater diffusion and acceptance of the Marian doctrines. Mysticism, especially women’s mystique, has certainly influenced the nourishment and creation of those Marian devotions which are testified to both by literature and works of art. The Ghent Altarpiece is marked by a profound unity between literary text and image and thus requires an integrated examination of both work of art and iconographic sourcing.

For several reasons it is therefore possible to say that the Mariology of Bridget is closely connected to the creation of the figures of the Virgin of the Ghent Altarpiece.

<sup>71</sup> Craveri, Marcello (2008), ed., *I Vangeli apocrifi*, Torino, Einaudi; Réau 1957, 615-637; Fournée, Jean (1970), “Himmelfahrt Mariens”, in Kirschbaum, Engelbert (1970), ed., *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie. Allgemeine Ikonographie*, vol. 2, Freiburg, Herder, coll. 276-283.

<sup>72</sup> *Reuelationes S. Brigittae VIII, Incipit*. See Jönsson, Arne (2002), ed., *Revelaciones. Book 8: Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.

## References

### Sources

- Aili, Hans (ed.), 1992, *Revelaciones. Book 4*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Bergh, Birger (ed.), 1967, *Revelaciones. Book 7*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Bergh, Birger (ed.), 1971, *Revelaciones. Book 5: Liber questionum*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Bergh, Birger (ed.), 1991, *Revelaciones. Book 6*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Collijn, Isak (ed.), 1924-31, *Acta et processus canonizacionis beate Birgitte*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Eklund, Sten (ed.), 1972, *Opera minora. II, Sermo Angelicus*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Fredriksson Adman, Anna (ed.), 2003, *Heymericus de Campo. Dyalogus Super Reuelacionibus Beate Birgitte. A Critical Edition with an Introduction*, Uppsala, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.
- Jönsson, Arne (ed.), 2002, *Revelaciones. Book 8: Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.
- Reuelaciones S. Brigittae, olim à card. Turrecremata recognitæ, nunc à Consaluo Duranto notis illustratae. Locis etiam quam plurimis ex manuscriptis codicibus restitutis, ac emendatis*, Romæ, in ædibus sanctæ Brigittæ viduæ, apud Stephanum Paolinum, 1606.
- Undhagen, Carl Gustaf (ed.), 1977, *Revelaciones. Book I*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell.

### Bibliography

- Baets O. P., Jacques de, 1961, *De gewijde teksten van het 'Lam Gods' Kritisch onderzocht*, Gent, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde.
- Baldass, Ludwig, 1952, *Jan van Eyck*, London, Phaidon.
- Bartolomei Romagnoli, Alessandra, 2013, *Santità e mistica femminile nel Medioevo*, Spoleto, Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 415-446.
- Bartolomei Romagnoli, Alessandra, Degl'Innocenti, Antonella, Santi, Francesco (eds.), 2015-2018, *Scrittrici mistiche europee*, 2 voll., Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo.
- Behling, Lottlisa, 1957, *Die Pflanze in der mittelalterlichen Tafelmalerei*, Weimar, Böhlau.
- Black, Antony, 1977, "The Realist Ecclesiology of Heymeric van de Velde", in Van Eijl, Edmond J. M (ed.), 1977, *Facultas S. Theologiae Lovanensis 1432-1797. Bijdragen tot haar geschiedenis*, Leuven, University Press, 273-291.
- Børresen, Kari Elisabeth, 1993, *Le Madri della Chiesa. Il Medioevo*, Napoli, M. D'Auria Editore.
- Bousmanne, Bernard, Johan, Frédérique, Van Hoorebeeck, Céline (eds.), 2001, *La Librairie des ducs de Bourgogne. Textes liturgiques, ascétiques, théologiques, philosophiques et moraux*, Turnhout, Brepols.
- Cecchin, Stefano M. (ed.), 2005, *La scuola francescana e l'Immacolata Concezione*, Atti del congresso mariologico francescano (S. Maria degli Angeli, Assisi, 4-8 dicembre 2003), Città del Vaticano, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis.
- Châtelet, Albert, 2011, *Hubert et Jan van Eyck créateurs de l'Agneau mystique*, Dijon, Faton.
- Craveri, Marcello (ed.), 2008, ed., *I Vangeli apocrifi*, Torino, Einaudi.
- De Moreau, Édouard, 1949, *Histoire de l'Église en Belgique. L'Église aux Pays-Bas sous les ducs de Bourgogne et Charles-Quint (1378-1559)*, vol. 4, Bruxelles, L'Édition universelle.
- Dhanens, Elizabeth, 1973, *Van Eyck. The Ghent Altarpiece*, New York, Lane.
- Ellington, Donna Spivey, 2001, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul, Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press.
- Fournée, Jean, 1970, "Himmelfahrt Mariens", in Kirschbaum, Engelbert (ed.), 1970, *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie. Allgemeine Ikonographie*, vol. 2, Freiburg, Herder, coll. 276-283.
- Fulton, Rachel, 1996, "Mimetic Devotion, Marian Exegesis, and the Historical Sense of the Song of Songs", *Viator* 27, 85-116.
- Gay-Canton, Réjane, 2011, *Entre dévotion et Théologie scolastique. Réceptions de la controverse médiévale autour de L'Immaculée Conception en pays germaniques*, Tournout, Brepols.
- Gastaldelli, Ferruccio, 2004, "Una mariologia d'avanguardia nel secolo XII. Immacolata Concezione e assunzione corporea di Maria secondo Goffredo d'Auxerre", in Piastra Clelia Maria and Santi, Francesco (eds.), 2004, *Figure poetiche e figure teologiche nella mariologia dei secoli XI e XII*, Atti del II Convegno mariologico della Fondazione Ezio Franceschini con la collaborazione della Biblioteca Palatina di Parma (Parma, 19-20 maggio 2000), Firenze, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 61-107.
- Goodgal, Dana Ruth, 1980, *The Iconography of the Ghent Altarpiece* Diss., University of Pennsylvania.
- Gottlieb, Carla, 1970, "'En ipse stat post parietem nostrum'. The Symbolism of the Ghent Annunciation", *Bulletin des Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 19, 92-94.
- Herzner, Volker, 1995, *Jan van Eyck und der Genter Altar*, Worms, Werner.
- Horst, Ulrich, 1987, *Die Diskussion um die Immaculata Conceptio im Dominikanerorden: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der theologischen Methode*, Paderborn, F. Schöningh.
- Huizinga, Johan, 1922, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, London, Penguin Books.
- Jönsson, Arne, 1989, *Alfonso of Jaén. His Life and Works with Critical Editions of the Epistola Solitarii, the Informaciones and the Epistola Servi Christi*, Lund, Lund University Press.
- La Delfa, Angela Maria, 2015, *Le Rivelazioni di santa Brigida di Svezia e l'iconografia: il caso dei Van Eyck*, Diss. Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana.
- Lane, Barbara G., 1984, *The Altar and the Altarpiece. Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting*, New York, Harper & Row.
- Lechner, Martin, 1971, "Das Marienbild in der Kunst des Westens bis zum Konzil von Trient", in Kirschbaum, Engelbert (ed.), 1971, *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie. Allgemeine Ikonographie*, vol. 3, Freiburg, Herder, coll. 182-184.

- Madigan, Brian Christopher, 1984, "Van Eyck's Illuminated Carafe", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 49, 227-230.
- McDonald, Grantley, 2015, "A Further Source for the Ghent Altarpiece? The Revelations of Bridget of Sweden", *Oud Holland* 128.1, 1-16.
- McGinn, Bernard (ed.), 1994, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, New York, Continuum.
- Meersseman, Gilles Gérard, 1948, "Les frères précheurs et le mouvement dévot en Flandre au XIIIe S.", *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 18, 69-130.
- Millard, Meiss, 1945, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings", *The Art Bulletin* (27), 175-181.
- Montag, Ulrich, 2000, "The Reception of St. Birgitta in Germany", in Morris, Bridget and O'Mara Veronica (eds.), 2000, *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars, Proceedings of the International Conference of Beverley-Hull July 1997*, Turnhout, Brepols, 106-116.
- Morris, Bridget and O'Mara Veronica (1999), 2000, *The Lives of Saint Birgitta of Sweden in the Vernacular, Proceedings of the International Conference of Beverley-Hull July 1997*, Turnhout, Brepols.
- Morris, Bridget and O'Mara Veronica (eds.), 2000, *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into the Medieval European Vernaculars, Proceedings of the International Conference of Beverley-Hull July 1997*, Turnhout, Brepols.
- Nyberg, Tore, 1965, *Birgittinische Klostergründungen des Mittelalters*, Lund, CWK Gleerup.
- Panofsky, Erwin, 1971, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 2 voll. New York, Harper & Row.
- Paola, Roberto, 2006, *Il salterio di Gesù e di Maria: genesi, storia e rivelazioni del santissimo rosario*, Conegliano, Ancilla.
- Pächt, Otto, 2002, *Van Eyck: die Begründer der altniederländischen Malerei*, München, Prestel.
- Brand Philip, Lotte, 1980, *The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Pozzi, Giovanni, 1993, *Sull'orlo del visibile parlare*, Milano, Adelphi.
- Purtle, Carol Jean, 1982, *The Marian paintings of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
- Réau, Louis, 1957, *Iconographie de l'Art Chrétien*, vol. 2/2, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.
- Reynaud, Nicole, 2006, *Jean Fouquet. Les Heures d'Étienne Chevalier*, Dijon, Fatou.
- Ritchie, Jennifer Ann, 2000, *The Nativity Panel of Isenheim Altarpiece and its relationship to the Sermo Angelicus of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, thesis in Master of Arts (Art History), University of North Texas.
- Sahlin, Claire L., 1996, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy. A Study of Gender and Religious Authority in the Later Middle Ages*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Salzer, Anselm, 1893, *Die Sinnbilder und Beiworte Mariens in der deutschen Literatur und lateinischen Hymnenpoesie des Mittelalters*, Seitenstetten, Selbstverl. des k. k. Ober-Gymnasiums.
- Sander Olsen, Ulla, 2005, "The Birgittine Order in the Netherlands through 600 Years: An Overview", *Birgittiana* 19, 193-202.
- Schneider, Wolfgang Christian, 2009, "Die Deesis des Genter Altars von Jan van Eyck und die Farbenspekulation des Heymericus des Campo", in Reinhardt, Klaus (ed.), 2009, *Heymericus de Campo. Philosophie und Theologie im 15. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg, Roderer, 205-223.
- Schwaetzer, Harald, 2009, "Bunte Geometrie. Die Farben im Sigillum aeternitatis des Heymericus de Campo im Kontext von Malerei und Philosophie", in Reinhardt, Klaus (ed.), 2009, *Heymericus de Campo. Philosophie und Theologie im 15. Jahrhundert*, Regensburg, Roderer, 183-204.
- Šebková-Thaller, Zuzana, 1992, *Sünde und Versöhnung in Jan van Eycks Hochzeitsbild. Die allegorische und anagogische Ebene des vierfachen Bildsinns*, Markt Berolzheim, Hernoul-le-Fin.
- Skaug, Erling S., 2001, "St Bridget's vision of the Nativity and Nicolò di Tommaso's late period", *Arte Cristiana* 89, 195-209.
- Therel, Marie Louise, 1984, *Le triomphe de la Vierge-Eglise. Sources historiques, littéraires et iconographiques*, Paris, Ed. du Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Toubert, Hélène, 1990, *Un art dirigé. Réforme grégorienne et Iconographie*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf.
- Ward, John, 1975, "Hidden Symbolism in Jan van Eyck's Annunciations", *The Art Bulletin* 57, 197-220.
- Westcott, Catherine Morris, 1992, "Birgittine devotion and the Campinesque Virgin in the Apse", *Athanas* 11, 32-41.
- Vauchez, André, 1999, *Saints, prophètes et visionnaires: le pouvoir surnaturel au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Albin Michel.