

From “The Life and Liturgy of Saint Birgitta of Sweden”

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“According to ecclesiastical tradition, Saint Birgitta’s mother--Ingeborg--was shipwrecked due to a storm while pregnant, but miraculously managed to be one of the only survivors to reach land. The following night, Ingeborg was visited by a celestial figure who informed her that the holy child within her womb--Birgitta--was the reason that her life was spared during the shipwreck,

You are saved because of the goodness that is in your womb.
Therefore, nurture it with the love of God for it is a gift given to you from God.

“When Birgitta was born in 1303, her birth is said to have been heralded by the Virgin Mary herself, who appeared in a vision to a local priest. The Virgin appeared to the priest seated upon a cloud and told him that:

a daughter is born to Birger (Birgitta’s father), whose voice will be heard throughout the world with admiration.

“From a very young age, Birgitta was devoted to her faith, and often fasted in addition to frequent prayer. At the age of thirteen, she married a nobleman named Ulf Gudmarsson, with whom she had eight children. Moreover, she accompanied her husband on pilgrimages and performed acts of charity for the underprivileged. Birgitta’s marriage lasted for twenty-eight years until she was widowed shortly after a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Following the death of her husband, she founded the Bridgettine Order (also known as the Order of the Holy Saviour)...

“In her book Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries (2006), Anne Bagnall Yardley addresses the history of the Bridgettine Order, and notes that Saint Birgitta “envisioned a constant flow of praise emanating from the sixty sisters and twenty-five brothers prescribed by her rule.” This was accomplished by the nuns singing their office directly after the brothers completed the recitation of their devotions. While the brothers continued to practice the already well-established Rule of Saint Augustine, Birgitta wished to establish a new Marian liturgy specifically for the nuns of her order.

“Bagnall Yardley notes that the Bridgettine liturgy was formed upon writings known as the *Sermo Angelicus* that were traditionally thought to have been dictated to Saint Birgitta by an Angel. These writings consisted of twenty-one lessons with three allotted to each day, and were dedicated to Marian reverence; that is, each day focused on different accounts of the Virgin Mary’s life. The *Sermo Angelicus* was translated from Swedish to Latin by Master Peter Olaf, who subsequently arranged the Bridgettine Office known as the *Cantus Sororum*. Bagnall Yardley highlights that both music and liturgy

belonging to the Bridgettine Office were composed specifically for this new order and a number of works were likely composed by Master Peter Olaf; however, many of the liturgical readings were written by Saint Birgitta herself. For instance, the readings recited for matins were reflections composed by Birgitta.

“While much of the music composed and sung for the Bridgettine liturgy was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Bridgettine nuns also sang daily chants that venerated Saint Birgitta. These chants were sung during lauds (early morning prayer) and vespers (evening prayer) and were part of an office that specifically incorporated music dedicated to Birgitta. Among these chants were antiphons bearing her name such as *Gaude Birgitta* and *O Birgitta*. Bagnell Yardley observes that these chants dedicated to Birgitta reminded the Bridgettine nuns of their founder’s role as a paragon of virtue and protective mother figure. For instance, the text of the chant *Gaude Birgitta* implores the saint to provide guidance in escaping earthly melancholy:

Gaude Birgitta canticum tibi debetur glorie deduc in refrigerium de lacunos miserie (Rejoice Birgitta. A song of glory is due to you. Lead us into rest out of the lake of misery).

“The feast days of Birgitta also provided ample opportunity for the Bridgettine nuns to sing praises to their founder. In *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries*, Bagnell Yardley provides an exemplary chant sung in commemoration of the Nativity of Saint Birgitta:

Virtutis dei dextere, trinam regenti machinam, trino ditata munere, birgitta dedit gloriam, captiva mundi carcere, mundam conservans animam. Soluta carpis onere, sponsoque iuncta sedere, partem elegit optimam.

This translates to:

To the one skillfully running, the triune machine of God’s strength, Birgitta, enriched by a three-fold gift, gave glory. Captive in this earthly prison, keeping her soul pure. Freed from the burden of the flesh and united with her spouse she chose to settle on the best role.

[...]

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of late medieval English choral music with special attention given to The Old Hall Manuscript. ”