



HAL
open science

Marian Emotions in Swedish Liturgy and St Birgitta's Revelations

Camille Bataille

► **To cite this version:**

Camille Bataille. Marian Emotions in Swedish Liturgy and St Birgitta's Revelations. The Fortieth Sewanee Medieval Colloquium: Medieval Emotions, Apr 2014, Sewanee, Tennessee, United States. hal-02541332

HAL Id: hal-02541332

<https://normandie-univ.hal.science/hal-02541332>

Submitted on 13 Apr 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Camille BATAILLE

« Marian Emotions in Swedish Liturgy and St Birgitta's *Revelations* ».

Although the Virgin Mary is a much addressed figure in the Late Middle Ages, she is surprisingly not often displayed as experiencing emotions. Most of the rare literature that addresses the question of the emotions of Mary is about the figure of the *Mater Dolorosa* and the compassion of the Virgin.¹ In that, modern research follows the medieval tradition. Although the Virgin Mary, as supernatural agent, is thought able to perceive human emotions and to communicate its own, there is not much emphasis on her feelings in medieval documents. The only exceptions to this are those linked to compassion, and occasionally joy linked to maternity and the Incarnation.

This paper consist of a discussion of two different types of Swedish sources: first, the Marian offices for two Swedish dioceses, Uppsala and Linköping. Second, Saint Birgitta's writings, in which the depictions of the Virgin are particularly significant. By combining these types of sources, I hoped to encounter in each of them a different profile of the "Emotional Mary," which would be inherent to the nature of the document. I choose to focus on Swedish material because the influence upon the liturgy by Birgitta's writings is particularly prominent.

However, I was surprised to find the same pattern of emotional display for the Virgin Mary in both types of sources. This is the phenomenon that I would like to describe and discuss in this paper. I will first examine the Marian emotions in two Swedish breviaries, and also comment on their presence in Birgitta's *Revelations*.

I. Marian emotions in Swedish liturgy

1. Description

Among the printed breviaries, the *Breviarium Lincopense* (1493) is the first one ever produced for a Swedish diocese.² A famous printer of liturgical books, Georg Stuchs of Nuremberg, realized it. Several years after, the *Breviarium Upsalense* (1496) is printed in Stockholm by Johannes Smedh and his wife Anna.³ Both breviaries are commissioned by the bishop of the respective dioceses: Henrik Tidemansson, bishop of Linköping (1465-1500) and the Archbishop of Uppsala Jakob Ulfsson (1469-1514). Their Marian content mainly consists in offices for the feasts of the Virgin Mary, seven at that time for those dioceses: the Purification (2nd of February), the Annunciation (25th of March), the Visitation (2nd of July), the Assumption (15th of August), the Nativity of the Virgin (8th of September) and the Conception (8th of December), plus the special Compassion which was a mobile feast in Linköping (*Sabbato in Albis*) and fixed to the 5th of May in Uppsala. In both breviaries, a Marian office for the Saturdays is also offered to the reader, as well as a Marian mass. In Linköping, this mass is specially labeled for the *Sabbato de compassione*, while in Uppsala, it is a more generic one meant to be said every day.⁴ The whole lot of offices makes Mary a

¹ See for example : Donna S. Ellington, « Impassioned mother or passive icon : The Virgin's role in Late Medieval and Early Modern Passion sermons », *Renaissance Quarterly*, 48:2 (1995), p. 227-261.

² Isak Collijn, *Sveriges Bibliografi, Sveriges Bibliografi Intill År 1600*, vol. I 1478-1530, Uppsala, 1934-1938, p. 128-132 ; Knut Peters (ed.), *Breviarium Lincopense*, 4 vol., Lund, 1950-1955. Sigurd Kroon, *Breviarium Lincopense 1493. De förlorade partierna*, Lund, 1951.

³ Isak Collijn, *Sveriges Bibliografi, op. cit.*, p. 148-154.

⁴ Other occurrences of the Virgin exists, such as in the *de tempora* part, but due to the short timing for this intervention, it will not be discussed here.

very important character in the breviaries, and her prominence in the annual liturgical cycle exceeds by far any other character, Christ excepted of course. However, the figure of the Virgin presented by those offices is very peculiar. Though her feasts are regularly present, her character seldom appears. Let us review the Marian emotional content of those offices. First of all, there is absolutely no emotion ascribed to the Virgin Mary in the prayers, for any office concerned. When an emotion occurs, it is only in the chant or in the lessons.

For the office of the Nativity of the Virgin, in both breviaries, there is simply no mention of any Marian emotion, in the lecture or in the chants. The joy of the participants in the celebration is stated in the songs, but it does not connect with the agent itself, the Virgin Mary. In the other oldest feasts, we find a fairly similar pattern: for the Assumption, there is nothing in the lectures, and only one antiphon (Antiphon 4, 1st Vespers : “*Anima mea liquefacta est*”) mentions love, but it is straightforwardly borrowed from the Song of Songs (Cant 5:7), and thus only indirectly applied to the Virgin.

The Annunciation mentions in two songs that Mary was startled at the word of the angel: “*Maria ut audivit turbata est*”⁵. The same phrase is present also in one lesson of the *Breviarium Lincopense*: lesson number 8.

The Purification is an occasion of great joy for the different categories of people taking part in the celebration: the virgins, the widows, the married people... but the Virgin Mary herself does not share this joy, except in two occasions: in the *Breviarium Lincopense*, the Responsorium for the First Vespers, “*Videte miraculum*” tells us how delighted Mary is to be both virgin and Mother.⁶ The motive is repeated in the third Responsorium of the Second Nocturne. But what is interesting is that this joy is not expanded in the most narrative part of the office: the lectures. In the *Breviarium Upsalense*, the lessons are cut just before the passage where the Virgin expresses a particular tenderness for the infant Child, and kisses him.⁷

The set of lectures of the *Breviarium Upsalense* for the Purification is very close to the Dominican set of lectures for this feast, for example in the lectionary of Humbert of Romans.⁸ The Dominican lessons are longer, but they contain only one mention of the Virgin’s kissing, while the critical edition of this sermon of Ambrosius Autpertus contains two. Théodore Koehler, who studied the spiritual maternity of Mary, insists on the rarity of such a display of

⁵ Such as in BU/BLi Antiphon 3 Nocturn 1 : *Maria turbata est [sic] in sermone* (CAO 3706) ; Resp. 3 Nocturn 1 : *Maria vt audiuit turbata est* ; BLi Lectio 8 : *turbata est in sermone*.

⁶ *Videte miraculum matris domini concepit virgo virile ignorans consortium stans onerata nobili onere Maria et matrem se laetam cognoscit quae se nescit uxorem*. (CAO 7869).

⁷ The lesson 3 stops just before this passage : « Quis, inquam, tui pectoris arcana nobis reserare ualeat, quibus modis cogitatum ad utraque flectebas, cum unum eundem que Dei atque hominis filium manibus tenens, hinc adorares ut Dominum, illinc osculareris ut paruulum? Quis ad tam ineffabile miraculum non obstupescat? Quis non paene elinguis fiat? Generat puella suum et omnium Creatorem, nutrit suum et omnium nutritorem, portat ad templum suum et omnium rectorem.

O admirandum spectaculum, ad quod non solum humana, uerum etiam angelica stupescit natura. Ad hoc, fratres carissimi, fidei oculos erigite, ad hoc pietatis affectu conuenite. Ibi Christum suscipite pro uobis in carne humiliatum, sed adorare in sua diuinitate Deum excelsum. Amplectimini paruulum, sed cogitate immensum. Amate humiliatum, sed timete excelsum ». Ambrosius Autpertus, *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae CCCM 27B p. x, l. x*; CPL 842; CPPM 164; [spe cap 4. l. 3]

⁸ Anne-Élisabeth Urfels-Capot, *Le sanctoral de l'office dominicain (1254-1256). Édition et étude d'après le ms Rome, Sainte-Sabine XIV LI*, Paris, 2007, p. 197-198.

affection at a time when the office of the Purification is settled.⁹ It is sufficient to note that such a display of affection by Mary is avoided in the liturgical lessons.

For the newest feasts, the trend is similar. In the office of the Conception, the lessons for the matins are narratives. The lessons 5 and 6 of the *Breviarium Lincopense* suggest a reaction of jealousy from the Virgin, but it is not explicit.¹⁰ In the *Breviarium Upsalense*, the sixth lesson is an addition to the original text as it is given by its first witness: Paris, BnF Latin 18168.¹¹ The addition starts with *Felix namque es Maria de parentum honorabilium nata* : a rare occasion where the Virgin is happy. In lesson 8, the incipit is *Tibi igitur nunc mater pio affectu*. The choice of words might be a display of emotion. Koehler, following other scholars, suggested that the signification of *pious* would be characteristic of the divine kindness in the devotional literature.¹² Here we would have an expression of a maternal affection, grounded on the benevolence of the Virgin. However, I do not believe the narrative nature of the lessons to be a sufficient reason to explain the presence of one and only one display of emotion.

In the office for the Visitation, no particular expression of emotion is displayed in the chants. In the lectures, the lesson 8 of the *Breviarium Upsalense* expresses the joy of Mary following the Annunciation, a motive that is repeated in the 4th day of the octave, lesson 6. We must note that the lessons are not a narrative, like in the Conception office: the lectures of the Visitation are built upon Urban VI's authorization to celebrate the feast, and on Sixtus IV's effort in favor of its propagation. The absence of narrative elements could very well be a reason why there is almost no display of emotion.

In the office for the Compassion, however, we encounter the most important display of emotions. In both breviaries, the office is *Stabat virgo dolorosa*¹³, which focuses on the pain of the Virgin at the Cross. When taking a closer look, the Antiphons 1 and 2 of the first Vespers insist on the pain of the Virgin. The third is about the bitterness of the scene, and the final two concern Christ. At the Magnificat, the Antiphon mentions again the pain of the Virgin. During the only Nocturne, as it is an office with only 3 lessons, the second Antiphon and the second Responsorium mention the pain. The lesson 1 in both breviaries is also concerned. Finally, the second Antiphon of the Laudes insist yet again on the pain, and the Antiphon at the Benedictus specify that the Virgin is *flebilis*, pathetic.

No further attention to the emotions of the Virgin is given in the Saturday offices, in both breviaries, nor in the masses provided.

2. Analysis

⁹ Théodore Koehler, « Les origines d'un thème dévotionnel : La maternité spirituelle de Marie dans la piété occidentale entre 750-1100. Etude historique et culturelle », *De cultu mariano saeculis VI-XI*, vol. 4, Rome, 1972, p. 347-380.

¹⁰ Those lessons are built on the miracle Poncelet nr 1713, a Hungarian devout of the Virgin getting married is convinced by the Virgin to marry her instead of the bride. See Albert Poncelet, « Index Miraculorum B. V. Mariae quae latine sunt conscripta », *Analecta Bollandiana*, n° 21 (1902), p. 242-360.

¹¹ Paris, BnF Lat. 18168, fol. 105v-110v. See Solange Corbin, « Miracula beatae Mariae semper virginis », *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, n° 39-40 (1967), p. 409-433, and Kati Ihnat, *Mary and the Jews in Anglo-Norman monastic culture*, Londres, University of Queen Mary, 2011, p. 62, note 138 p. 101, and the edition of the office p. 222. Kati Ihnat adds to the list of mss containing the text : Cambridge, CUL Ii. 4.20. The In Principio Database lists for the incipit of this text yet one more ms. : Leipzig, UB Ms 618, according to a reference given by the *Bibliographie annuelle du Moyen Âge tardif*, t. 13, Paris-Turnhout, 2003, n° 4108.

¹² Théodore Koehler, « Les origines... », *op. cit.*, p. 359-360.

¹³ AH 24:48.

With the exception of the office for the Compassion, where a full emphasis is made on the pain felt by Mary at the Cross, in most offices, the references to the her emotions are scarce. A binary set of emotions or feelings is used: either strictly speaking, the excruciating pain the Virgin suffers from at the Crucifixion, or a rather vague joy at the Annunciation that is not even expressed in the dedicated office, but in the one for the Visitation: I believe that the formulary for the Annunciation, quite older than the formulary for the Visitation, reflects also a different sensibility toward the expression of feelings. This evolution is hard to document with only two offices, however. Among the oldest offices, the one for the Purification tends to confirm the impression of rejection of an emotionally-loaded vocabulary. I already mentioned briefly how the expression of tenderness of the Mother toward the Child has been cut out of the liturgical version of the *Sermo in Purificatione sanctae Mariae* of Ambrosius Autpertus.

For the newest offices, the Compassion offers a totally opposite profile. We must note that in the stock of the liturgical vocabulary, pain is very rarely used: in the index of Albert Blaise's *Le vocabulaire latin des principaux thèmes liturgiques*¹⁴, the only expressions based on *dolor* are connected to the Virgin. *Dolor* is not a variety of *tristitia* or *desperatio* (sadness, despair): it is connected to the body, and thus, a key indicator of humanity.¹⁵ Insisting on the pain and suffering felt by the Virgin Mary is a way to show that her body is marked by the divine. Insisting on the desperation of her grieving could have spread the dogmatically dangerous idea of Mary expressing what was often classified as a vice.¹⁶ As other offices for the compassion, or the Seven Sorrows, the Swedish office may very well aim at stimulating an emotional response in the performer or listener.¹⁷ However, this hypothesis is difficult to verify: this office is very strongly influenced by the writings of Saint Birgitta;¹⁸ the Compassion theme appears in Sweden in the early 15th century¹⁹, but it is not particularly developed until the end of the century, even in Vadstena, Birgitta's abbey.²⁰

II. Marian emotion in Birgitta's writings

1. The rarity of Marian emotions

Saint Birgitta's set of writings includes 9 books of the *Revelationes*, plus the rule for the *Ordo Sancti Salvatoris*, the weekly matins lectures for the sisters of the Order called the *Sermo angelicus*, and 4 prayers.²¹ This corpus of texts very often mentions the Virgin Mary since she

¹⁴ Albert Blaise, *Le vocabulaire latin des principaux thèmes liturgiques*, Turnhout, 1966, 639 p.

¹⁵ Donald Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology. Academic Debates on the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century*, Woodbridge, 2009, p. 15, 38.

¹⁶ Robert Marcoux, « Vultus velatus ou la figuration positive de la tristesse dans l'iconographie de la fin du Moyen Âge », *Médiévales*, n° 61 (2011) : *La chair des émotions*, p. 2-19.

¹⁷ On the Virgin Mary as both exemple and mediator of emotions to the end of devotional practices, see Carol M. Schuler, « The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary: Popular culture and cultic imagery in Pre-Reformation Europe », *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, n° 21:1-2 (1992), p. 5-28.

¹⁸ The correlation between the two has been already discussed, see for example Tryggve Lundén « Jungfru Maria som korredemptrix eller medåterlösarinna. Framställd i liturgisk diktning och bildkonst från Sveriges medeltid », *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift*, n° 79 (1979), p. 32-60.

¹⁹ Aarno Malin(iemi), *Der Heiligenkalender Finnlands. Seine Zusammensetzung und entwicklung*, Helsinki, 1925, p. 240 ; Sven Helander (ed.), *Ordinarium Lincopensis c:a 1400 och dess liturgiska förebilder*, Lund, 1957, p. 44.

²⁰ Stephan Borgehammar, « Marias medlidande. Ett bidrag till studiet av birgittinsk spiritualitet », S.-E. Brodd et A.Härdelin (ed.), *Maria i Sverige under tusen år.*, vol. 1, Skellefteå, 1996, p. 335.

²¹ Sancta Birgitta, *Opera minora I. Regula salvatoris*, S. Eklund (ed.), Lund, 1975 ; *Ibid.*, *Opera minora II. Sermo angelicus*, S. Eklund (ed.), Uppsala, 1972 ; *Ibid.*, *Opera minora III. Quattuor Oraciones*, S. Eklund (ed.), Arlöv, 1991 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book I*, C.-G. Undhagen (ed.), Uppsala, 1978 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book II*, C.-G. Undhagen & Birger Bergh (ed.), Stockholm, 2001 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book III*, A.-M. Jönsson (ed.),

is, Christ excepted, the main agent of the revelation process. In about 700 revelations, the Virgin speaks, or is mentioned, nearly 1110 times in the *Revelations*. In order to get a profile of the Marian content of Birgitta's writings, I counted all the expressions used to characterize Mary. In that typology, 104 items have been singled out. When information is provided about Mary's personality, it is about her virtues. 19 different virtues are attributed to the Virgin, but only three emotions are recurrent: pain, love and joy. Other emotions do occur, but rarely: the fear or anxiety of the Virgin is mentioned 4 times, her wonder, her desire, her reverence, her consolation are mentioned 2 times each, her anger is mentioned once, and there is one mention of an undefined emotion.

What is striking is that so few emotions are attributed to the Virgin, but emotion is her most common characteristic. The *dolor*, that is, the pain and sorrow the Virgin experienced during the Passion is mentioned 75 times in the *Revelations* corpus. The Virgin is also called once *Mater dolorosa*, in Lib. VII, Rev. 15:16, which makes ultimately 76 occurrences of the theme. It is a very important theme, since no other characteristic of the Virgin is mentioned so often: the *misericordia* (mercy) of Mary, the second characteristic in ranks, occurs only 37 times in the whole corpus. Then her beauty follows (30 occurrences). With 29 occurrences, the joy felt by the Virgin follows closely, then the expression *Mater misericordie* (28 occurrences). The love of Mary is the next characteristics in ranks with 25 occurrences.

Even if we count together the mentions of the mercy and the expression *Mater misericordie*, this theme occurs 65 times, less than the 76 occurrences of Mary's pain. In the corpus, for one mention of the Virgin's love, her sorrow is mentioned more than twice. The joys of the Virgin do not match the number of occurrences of her sorrows: 29 to 76.

2. The corporeality of Mary's emotions

In Birgitta's writings, this emphasis on the Virgin's pain is understandable: rather than a mere object of identification for Birgitta, the Virgin is perceived as a real individual.²² It is extremely interesting to note the context in which the mentions of pain, love and joy are made. In most of the cases, there is a connection with corporeality, with a human materiality.

	Incarnation	Childhood of the VM	Intercession	Passion	Resurrection	Other	Total
Occurrences	8	7	3	2	1	4	25

Table 1 : Occurrences of the love felt by the Virgin in the *Revelations*

If we examine Table 1, the occurrences of love felt by the Virgin, we observe that the themes of the childhood of the Virgin Mary and Incarnation are closely linked. The aim of the theme of childhood is to show that the Virgin is perfectly worthy of being the Mother of God. This is why we can place this theme under the Incarnation category. Passion and Resurrection are

Uppsala, 1998 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book IV*, H. Aili (ed.), Göteborg, 1992 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book VI*, B. Bergh (ed.), Stockholm, 1991 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book VII*, B. Bergh (ed.), Uppsala, 1967 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones. Book VIII. Liber celestis imperatoris ad reges*, H. Aili (ed.), Stockholm, 2002 ; *Ibid.*, *Revelaciones Extravagantes*, L. Hollman (ed.), Uppsala, 1956.

An English translation is proposed by Bridget Morris & Denis Searby, up to Book VII in Spring 2014. The last books are planned to be translated as well. Bridget Morris & Denis Searby (ed.), *The revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden. Vol. 1 Liber Caelestis, Books I-III*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006 ; *Ibid.*, *The revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden. Vol. 2 Liber Caelestis, Books IV-V*, Oxford, 2008 ; *Ibid.*, *The revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden. Vol. 3 Liber Caelestis, Books VI-VII*, Oxford, 2012.

²² « Maria är således för Birgitta långt mer än ett identifikationsobjekt ; hon är utan vidare en verklig individ, värd vår uppmärksamhet och vördnad... », Stephan Borgehammar, « Marias medlidande. Ett bidrag till studiet av birgittinsk spiritualitet », S.-E. Brodd et A.Härdelin (éd.), *Maria i Sverige under tusen år.*, vol. 1, Skellefteå, 1996, p. 334.

two other themes closely linked to corporeality. In summary, 18 occurrences of the love of the

	Incarnation	Childhood of the VM	Passion	Resurrection/Ascension /Assumption	Total
Occurrences	12	1	7	9	29

Virgin out of 25 happen in a context where corporeality is the main topic.

Table 2 : Occurrences of the joy felt by the Virgin in the *Revelations*

A similar repartition of the occurrences is observable for manifestations of joy. 13 mentions of the joys of the Virgin are linked to the context of the Incarnation, out of 29. The second group particularly well represented concerns the transfer of bodies toward Heaven (9 items). Finally, the Passion concerns 7 mentions. The hypothesis of corporeality of the Virgin emotions is strengthened.

	Incarnation	Passion	Other	Total
Occurrences	5	65	5	75

Table 3: Occurrences of the pain or sorrow felt by the Virgin in the *Revelations*

Last, in Table 3, without any surprise, most of the mentions of sorrow or pain felt by the Virgin happen in the context of the Passion. But we must add 5 mentions linked to the childhood of Christ or, more generally speaking, to the Incarnation, and 4 other that appear in the context of the Purification, that is, a feast where the bodily nature of the Virgin is exalted. One last mention is not imputable.

Conclusion

To sum up the description and analysis of those two types of sources: in liturgy, we observed that although the Virgin Mary is regularly present, there are few occasions where her feelings or emotions are described. In most cases, the oldest offices carefully avoid the issue. The example of the lectures in the office of the Purification, which cut the text from Ambrosius Autpertus right before the mention of the tender affection of Mary towards the Child, is typical. In the newest offices, there is not much more display of emotion, except in the office for the Compassion. Although this office contains highly narrative elements, I do not find them to be the main reason for the presence of an emotional content, since the office of the Conception does not mention Marian feelings even though its lessons are of a narrative nature. It means that since the nature of the text used does not determine its emotional content, the text object must be considered. The Swedish Compassion office, influenced by Birgitta's writings, is highly focused on the pain and sorrows of the Virgin. The focus on *dolor* as a primary locus for the manifestation of emotion is confirmed in the examination of Birgitta's work itself.

The *Revelation* corpus is highly narrative in form, and yet, there is only three emotions that are recurrent for the Virgin, the second most present character : Pain, love, and joy.

I excluded virtues from the range of the survey, since virtue imply the idea of a long-term disposition²³. And yet, the personality of the Virgin is not described in terms of emotions, but mainly in terms of virtue. The 19 virtues of the Virgin in Birgitta's writings are used to add to the narrative efficiency of Mary's character. However, those three emotions are *more present* quantitatively speaking, than any virtue. For example, Pain/Sorrow occurs 76 times, versus Mercy, which occurs 65 times.

²³ Roberts C. Roberts, « Emotions among the Virtues of the Christian Life », *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, n° 20:1 (1992), p. 43-44.

Another trait is remarkable : the mentions of emotions felt by the Virgin are almost always in connection with a bodily, corporeal dimension. The theme of the revelation and the context of the expression of the feeling, both involve the Incarnation, the transfer of holy bodies to Heaven, or the Passion. Emotions are perceived as embedded in carnality, that they are only invoked in the context of the corporeal mysteries in Birgitta's discourses.

What is interesting here is that it denotes a *practice* of the emotions in the Late Middle Ages. Birgitta is a witness of a spontaneous use of the emotions: she uses them mainly and most importantly to give her reader a deeper description of the events in the history of salvation that are primarily connected to the body. After a first and fecund historiographical movement that tried to set a new study objects: emotions, I believe that it might be time now to move on to the next step. Rather than focus on sources where emotions are the main object of the discourse – there are few studies of medievalists on emotions that does not quote Thomas Aquinas - scholarship could focus on the sources in which emotions are not the main topic, in sources where emotions are present, but incidentally. This second moment of the historiography of medieval emotions could well benefit for the examination of sources where emotions are poorly represented, such as liturgy.