CHAPTER 2

# Making Birgitta Italian: The Time of Translation

*Jane Tylus*

"Come in una femmina sono fatte tante cose?" "How could so many things have been done by a female?"[1] This is the question that then-Cancelliere della Repubblica Fiorentina, Piero di Ser Mino da Montevarchi, was mulling over as he lay, dying, in 1410. Heir to the famous Coluccio Salutati, Piero was a person of consequence in early 15th-century Tuscany, and the question he was pondering was no doubt that of others as well. For the "femmina" was Birgitta of Sweden. Her writings had inspired a group of Piero's fellow Tuscans, including a close friend of Salutati, to found the first monastery devoted to the Birgittine Order in Italy, the Monastero del Paradiso. Barely a mile southeast of Florence's walls, the convent had already attracted two of Piero's brothers. Yet when Piero "heard and read about all the great marvels God had accomplished through [Birgitta], and in her,"[2] he could not resist entertaining some doubts.

As Satan comes to take his soul, provoking Piero's screams and others' stupefaction, "a venerable lady appears: Saint Birgitta" ("una venerabile donna, la quale era Santa Brigida"). Given Piero's skepticism moments earlier, her gaze is "full of disdain, as though she were reproaching him for his lack of faith and that bit of doubt he'd entertained regarding her deeds." Nonetheless, he feels great comfort in her presence, and for good reason: when Satan sees her

1 *Orazioni di Santa Brigida principessa di Svezia*, ed. Francesco Grottanelli (Siena: 1867), 34, from the section "Come uno uomo famoso e notabile di Firenze, posto in estremo di morte per infermità apparvegli Santa Brigida, e scampollo, come quivi leggerai." Translations from Italian are my own unless otherwise noted.

2 "Udendo e leggendo le grandi meraviglie le quali Dio per lei ed in lei aveva fatte." *Orazioni di Santa Brigida*, 34. The line implies that Piero was already familiar with Birgitta's works. He could certainly have accessed them in Latin even as the Italian translation made in Siena in 1399 on which this essay will focus may have been available in Florence by 1410. It's of considerable interest that Piero di Ser Mino's question about the "femmina" echoes the rhetorical question made by Birgitta's confessor Magister Mathias in his prologue to Book I of the *Revelations*: "Quis enim, nisi eiusdem spiritus gracia preuentus, credere poterit, quod Christus, residens in celo, loquatur femine, in hac mortalitate adhuc degenti" ("Indeed, unless guided by the grace of the same spirit, who could believe that Christ, who resides in heaven, would speak to a woman [*femine*] still living in this mortal condition?"). Prologus 18. English translations from *The Revelations of Birgitta of Sweden*, trans. Denis Searby, with introductions and notes by Bridget Morris, 4 vols. (Oxford: 2006–2015), 1, 49.

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standing beside Piero, he takes flight. And then a voice says to Piero, in Latin, "Hic est mulier que te liberavit, ne Sathan te opprimeret" ("This is that lady who freed you from Satan, so that he would not harm you").[3] She disappears, and Piero is immediately cured. He relinquishes his prestigious appointment as chancellor and dedicates all he has to Il Paradiso, where he goes to live with his brothers and spend the rest of his days.

Almost a century after this "miracolo," we have the considerably less dramatic conversion of another humanist: Aldus Manutius, printer and businessman of early modern Venice who by the year 1500 had made his name publishing the great classics of ancient Greek and Latin. For his second work in the Italian vernacular – and his first (and as it would turn out, only) by a woman, with the exception of several lyrics of Sappho – he turned to the letters of Catherine of Siena. As he says in his dedicatory letter, over 350 of Catherine's epistles, "suppressed for some 120 years," and left "unknown and hidden," have now been recovered by printers ready and able to do God's will.[4]

Catherine's letters, possessed of such force that they not only exhort their readers to do good works but compel them to do so ("constrengono"), appeared in the dark days of September 1500. Alexander VI, the Borgia pope praised by Machiavelli, is on the throne as "the infidels take up their swords and march their marvelous armies across land and sea with the intent of destroying the faith of Christ."[5] Given the urgency of Catherine's voice, her letters seem to have been written to the popes, cardinals, and leaders "of today," and Aldus considered it his job to make them heard and acted upon. Hence his dedication to a man he had never met and would never meet, Francesco Piccolomini, nephew of the humanist pope Pius II, and soon to become Pius III. It is a volume characterized most signally by its usefulness or "utilità" in these difficult times, and in fact, it was "non senza costituzione divina" that the letters are coming to light only in 1500. Thanks to the imminent threat of the Turk to the

3 *Orazioni di Santa Birigida*, 35. The Latin is translated by the author of the account as "Questa è quella donna che t'ha liberato da Satan, ché non t'abbia oppresso."

4 "Soppresse già circa centovinti anni"; "incognite e ascose". In *Epistole devotissime de S. Catharina da Siena* (Venice: 1500), f.iv.

5 "… l'infideli sono in arme con stupendo exercito et apparato per mare et per terra con animo de destrure la fede di Christo"; *Epistole*, f.iv. In his biography of Aldus, Martin Lowry calls attention to the "collective self-reproach" in which Venetians engaged after their loss of Modon and of the fortress at Lepanto to the Ottomans, blaming the defeat "on the just anger of the Almighty." "An unsigned letter to the doge denounced public venality and private immorality, calling for repentance before the tide of Turkish success could be checked. It was read aloud in the council-chambers, and published by the vigilant Patriarch Donà. Venice was embarking on a moral, as well as a military crusade." Martin Lowry, *The World of Aldus Manutius* (Ithaca: 1979), 124–25.

Venetian state and current pope, for whom Pius II may serve as a not-so-gentle reminder of better days gone by, Catherine becomes central to the moment in a fashion that is not without meaning for our humanist who had spent his career demonstrating the utility of works considered long-lost.[6] Aldus's insistence on the disappearance of Catherine's words since her death (not entirely true, thanks to the long manuscript tradition and a recent publication of several dozen of her letters) gives new urgency to those words, as he infers that this woman's writings might prompt reform in the spheres where it is needed most.

On the surface these two accounts appear to have little in common. Piero di Ser Mino goes from wondering about Birgitta as a (mere) *femmina* to recognizing her powers as a *mulier* – a *donna*. While we have no such narrative for Aldus, he too seeks to create the presence of a forceful woman who can engage with the leaders of his own time as well as her own. Along with a full-page image of Catherine that will be discussed towards the end of this essay, the stature of the large folio volume suggests through its sheer heft that she is a woman worth reckoning with. Both hinge on recognizing these women's gifts in moments of crisis, personal or global as they may be, gifts long concealed: the truths contained in Catherine's letters, the powerful nature of Birgitta's sanctity. Birgitta reveals a perhaps exacerbated patience with Piero's mild if continued obstinacy, while Catherine could fancifully be said to have patiently awaited the invention of print to bring to the world her words – and God's.

This connection, moreover, is not a casual one. In some ways, Aldus's publication of Catherine's letters represents Birgitta's return to Venice, albeit in a new guise. Aldus's comments to Piccolomini make of Catherine nothing short of a prophet, the charismatic religious figure with which Birgitta was identified throughout her long career. Catherine and her hagiographers alike studiously avoided the term, as did Pius II in his bull of canonization. But as Aldus's Catherine takes on characteristics long associated with Birgitta, we see a Catherine emerge whose words are about to be heard by the right people. She thus belongs in the same category as a Birgitta whose voice was increasingly associated with instances of prophecy more broadly in the early modern period, as the essay by Jessica Goethals and Anna Wainwright in this volume compellingly lays out. The humanist concept of finding words long gone missing – or ignored – is thus neatly connected to the prophetic stance

6 Aldus would weigh in at other moments of his publishing career in regard to the ever-increasing Turkish threat, and nowhere more explicitly than in a letter to Pope Leo X, whom he urges in 1514 in the preface of Plato's complete works "to ensure for your Christians everywhere peace … Now alas, they wage ferocious wars against each other and diminish with hostile armaments the powerful forces of Christianity. It would be better that the troublesome Turks perished by them" ("quo graves Turcae Melius perirent"). Aldus Manutius, *The Greek Classics*, ed. and tr. N.G. Wilson (Cambridge: 2016), 244–45.

defined by Birgitta herself in her *Revelations*. We will see that stance defended by Alfonso of Jaén, one of Birgitta's confessors responsible for compiling the final text of her *Revelations* – an editorial process not unlike that in which Aldus engaged – and arguing for Birgitta's sanctity prior to her canonization in 1391.[7]

But the connection between Birgitta and Aldus's Catherine is also geographical. Birgitta "began" her editorial life in Venice, where the Sienese Dominican Tommaso Caffarini spent three decades advocating for Catherine's sainthood. The scriptorium that Caffarini assembled in the church of San Domenico was a bustling hub for the production of manuscripts by and about Catherine, including Raymond of Capua's hagiographic masterpiece, the so-called *Legenda maior*.[8] Caffarini wrote an abridged version of Raymond's hagiography, typically referred to as the *Legenda minor*, as well as a long treatise called the *Libellus de supplemento*, containing material "supplemental" to Raymond's work. And here is where Birgitta made one of her first Venetian appearances. Caffarini devoted a substantial section of his *Libellus* to describing the stigmata that Catherine received while in Pisa in 1375. In that context he references Birgitta, twice, by way of a detail from one of the early accounts of her life:[9] "On Fridays she would pour burning drops from a wax candle onto her bare flesh, leaving wounds. If sometimes the wounds would heal before the next Friday, she would scratch them open with her fingernails.... This she did on account of the Passion of Jesus Christ." The reference is accompanied by an illustration in the manuscript of Caffarini's *Libellus de Supplemento*.[10] But Birgitta was present in Venice in other ways. Significantly, the manuscript in

7 Birgitta's canonization of 1391 did not mean that such a defense was over. See Fausto Arici's discussion of the role of Juan de Torquemada in establishing a "safer" version of female prophecy that would make Birgitta more acceptable to her critics. Fausto Arici, "Juan de Torqemada e il paradigma di verificabilità della profezia femminile," in *Il velo, la penna e la parola*, ed. Gabriella Zarri and Gianni Festa (Florence: 2009), 265–74. The literature on Birgitta's reputation as prophet is vast; see Unn Falkeid's chapter "The Prophetic Widow," in her book *The Avignon Papacy Contested. An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, MA: 2017): 121–45; and Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Suffolk: 2001).

8 On Caffarini's scriptorium, see the introduction to the vernacular edition of the *Supplementum* and Gaudenz Freuler, "Andrea di Bartolo, Tommaso Caffarini, and Sienese Dominicans in Venice," *Art Bulletin* 69 (1987), 570–86, especially 571–73.

9 "The Life of Blessed Birgitta" by Prior Peter and Master Peter in *Birgitta of Sweden, Life and Selected Revelations*, ed. Marguerite T. Harris (Mahwah: 1989), par. 83; 96: "It was her custom too, on Fridays, to pour on her bare flesh flaming drops from a burning candle so that they left wounds remaining ...."

10 For the text, see the modern edition of the *Libellus de supplemento: Legende prolixe virginis beate Catherine de Senis*, ed. Giulia Cavallini and Imelda Foralosso (Rome: 1974), 2.7.1; 124. On the marginal illustrations done by Cristoforo Cortese for Caffarini's personal

which the miracle of Piero di Ser Mino's deliverance from death is first found was crafted in Caffarini's scriptorium. In addition to containing a vita (abbreviata) of Birgitta, along with her miracles – capped off by that most recent one regarding Piero – it also contains a "Leggenda di Caterina," along with a copy of Caffarini's *Legenda minor* and a sermon in praise of St. Catherine, both in Italian translation. Moreover, both "leggende" open with images of their respective saints by the same illuminator – most likely Cristoforo Cortese – and bearing striking similarities. The likenesses suggest the affinity that the copyists sought to produce between Birgitta and Italy's own holy woman, whose followers were aspiring in that very moment (most likely in or around 1411, shortly after Piero's dramatic account) to bring to sanctity.[11]

Yet the real bond between the two women and one that will take us far from Venice for the next section of this essay is a Sienese notary, Cristofano di Gano Guidini, a close follower of Catherine during her lifetime. By the time Caffarini visited him in Siena in 1398, eighteen years after Catherine's death, he had become an oblate in Siena's Spedale di Santa Maria following the deaths of his wife and children. During this visit, Caffarini received from Guidini several manuscripts of Catherine's letters. We cannot know what else the two men discussed during Caffarini's return to Siena. But the following year, the first full Italian translation of Birgitta's *Revelations* appeared in Siena, thanks to funding provided by Guidini and a friend, as is clear from the colophon of a two-volume manuscript now in Siena's Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati: "This book belongs to the compagnia of the Virgin Mary of Siena. Ser Cristofano di Gano, notary of the hospital, enabled it to be written ("El quale fece scrivere") through his funding and that of Meio di Jacomo, who went to the sepulcher of Christ and did not return in 1399. Pray to God for them both."[12] While this

manuscript of the treatise of the stigmata, see Freuler, "Andrea di Bartolo, Tommaso Caffarini, and Sienese Dominicans in Venice," 575–77.

11 See Diega Giunta, "La dimensione dottrinale della raffigurazione di S. Caterina da Siena," in *Catharina: testi ed immagini di S. Caterina da Siena nelle raccolte casanatensi*, ed. Giuliana Cavallini and Angela Adriana Cavarra (Milan:1998), 365, which includes the illustrations of both miniatures ("Leggenda abbreviate di santa Caterina"; "Leggenda di santa Brigida di Svezia", T.II.6). Also see the initial chapter of Giunta's book *L'iconografia di Santa Caterina* (Rome: 1988), entitled "Dal transito ai primi decenni del XV secolo." The *terminus ultra quem* of 1411 would fit with Silvia Nocentini's hypothesis that the translator of Caffarini's *Legenda minor*, Stefano Maconi, returned to Italy – specifically Pavia – that same year, after having lived in Seitz (Slovenia) for a number of years as prior general of the Carthusians; see Nocentini, "The Transmission of Birgittine and Catherinian Works within the Mystical Tradition," in *Sanctity and Female Authorship: Birgitta of Sweden & Catherine of Siena*, ed. Maria H. Oen and Unn Falkeid (New York: 2020), 110, n46.

12 Cited in Domenico Pezzini, "The Italian Reception of Birgittine Writings," *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden into Medieval European Vernaculars*, ed. Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara (Turnhout: 2002), 188.

manuscript of the translated *Revelations* was destined for use by the Compagnia della Vergine Maria, a group of devotees and penitents connected to Siena's Spedale that dates back to the 13th century, it was hardly limited to circulation in the Spedale where the Compagnia met.[13] As Brian Richardson notes in his essay in this volume, it quickly became the ur-text for many subsequent manuscript copies of Birgitta's work, in whole and mostly in part, that flooded convents and monasteries throughout Italy; there are no fewer than twenty extant codices, most of them from Tuscany.[14] Particularly notable about the Sienese translation, aside from its completeness – the next such effort would not occur until the 17th century – is an introduction to Birgitta's opus by the Italian translator. Recently transcribed and published by Domenico Pezzini, this fascinating preface is crucial in determining the usefulness of Birgitta to Italy – and vice versa.[15] And while we cannot know with certainty the identity of Birgitta's first translator into Italian, the notary Guidini's role in procuring the translation is unquestioned. So is his role in translating Catherine's *Dialogo della divina Provvidenza* into Latin several years earlier. Scholars such as Silvia Nocentini believe there is an excellent chance that Guidini himself undertook much of the translation of Birgitta into Italian and wrote the preface; and that he may have used a copy of the *Revelations* brought from Venice by Caffarini.[16] Thus while questions remain, he will be referenced as the translator in the following pages.

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13 Although it was still listed in the Compagnia's records from 1492, in the *Capitoli della Compagnia dei Disciplinati di Siena*, ed. Luciano Banchi (Siena: 1866), 107: "Due libri in due volumi in vulgare dell'OPERA DI S. BRIGIDA, scritto a penna, bona lettera, in carta pecorina."

14 On the details of the translation's success, see Michele Lodone, "Santa Brigida in Toscana. Volgarizzamenti e riscritture profetiche," *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia* 73.1 (2019), 69–84; 73–76; Pezzini, "The Italian Reception of Birgittine Writings," 188–89; and more recently, Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento italiano delle Rivelazioni e degli altri scritti di S. Brigida," *Santa Brigida, Napoli, L'Italia*, ed. Olle Ferm Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perricciolі Saggese, and Marcello Rotili (Naples: 2009), 61–73. Nuns at Il Paradiso monastery in Florence would undertake several copies of this manuscript, as well as an apparently new, partial translation, according to Lodone, by one Suor Cleofe in the late 1400s.

15 Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento italiano." For a more extensive commentary on vernacular translations of Birgitta's works in late medieval and early modern Europe, see the "Introduction" by Bridget Morris and Veronica O'Mara in *The Translation of the Works of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Morris and O'Mara, 1–24.

16 My thanks to Professor Nocentini for her consultation with me about this possibility, along with her comments more generally on this essay. See her succinct introduction to Guidini with specific references to what she calls his "process of double translation," as he worked back and forth between Latin and Italian throughout his lifetime. Nocentini, "The Transmission of Birgittine and Catherinian Works," in *Sanctity and Felame Authorship*, ed. Oen and Falkeid, esp. 101–105.

These connections between Catherine's followers and Birgitta's works have long been noted. Yet as I'll indicate in the following remarks, there are uncanny echoes of Birgitta and her first Italian translator in Aldus's preface as well. These are echoes suggestive not of any direct influence but of a way of thinking about the textual transmission of two powerful women writers shared by – possibly – the notary Cristofano di Gano Guidini who would dedicate himself to the charitable work of Siena's Spedale after losing his wife and children to the plague, and the humanist whose publications prior to Catherine's letters had been, with one exception, Greek and Latin "classics." These parallels in turn speak to the potential for reform that is at the heart of this volume: reform that hinges on acts of translation, whether it be the translation or "turn" from Latin to Italian, Sweden to Rome, heaven – the source of revelations – to earth. And to return to Piero di Ser Mino, there is also the translation of the "femmina" into the *mulier* and *donna* whose authority is acknowledged by virtue of others engaging with and acting on her words.

The Sienese translation of Birgitta's work, and the act of translation more generally, will be at the center of the remainder of this essay. And translation as a practice was moreover critical to both the spiritual practices of late medieval Italians, and the burgeoning secular practices of humanism. Indeed, they are arguably interconnected. If Piero di Ser Mino leaves the humanist's pursuit behind when he devotes himself to the life of a Brigittine monk, Aldus integrates the language of the *donna santa* into his humanistic project. The language of prophetic voice used by Birgitta and accentuated by our Sienese translator provides us with an important analogy to the discourse of humanism practiced by Petrarch, Aldus, and others:[17] words that have been waiting for the right time to be revealed. With respect to Birgitta, that "right time" could happen only in Italy – and only through a translation into Italian.

## "The Slowness of Speech"

Walter Benjamin has been one of the most influential theorists of translation – and a theorist whose views of the process were in turn influenced by his deep engagement with the concept of messianic time. This concept is rooted in

17 See in particular Petrarch's reflections on his recovery of Cicero's letters and his comment on how he in turn responds to Cicero "as if he were a friend living in my time … forgetting as it were the gap of time ("quasi temporum oblitus")," quoted in William Kennedy, *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England* (Baltimore: 2003), 24.

Jewish mystical thought as reflected in the Pauline notion of salvation, as Giorgio Agamben has argued: "The messianic event has already happened, salvation has already been achieved … but nevertheless, in order to be truly fulfilled, this implies an additional time."[18] Agamben quotes the Israeli philosopher Gershom Scolem, who characterizes Messianic time as "a life lived in deferment," "a kind of border zone, or even 'a transitional time between two periods."[19] Translation acknowledges this deferral even as it becomes an illusory example of messianic presence, the delayed or deferred meaning finally able to realize itself in and through the time of a foreign language. Or as Benjamin puts it, through the act of translation, "the life of the original attains its latest, continually renewed, and most complete unfolding" – as though translators were prophets, recognizing the "unfolding" still to be done, charged as they are with "the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own."[20] The Italian vernacular was going through its own "birth pangs" in the late 14th century. Might these considerations then have been relevant for our Sienese translator of Birgitta's oeuvre – full of prophetic revelations that need time and space to properly unfold and be understood, in a way that translation is in a unique position to enable?

Cristofano Guidini would have been a good bet for such a translation. As he records in his *Memoirs*, written sometime in the late 1390s, he learned his "gramatica" – his Latin – early on, thanks to the intervention of kindly relatives, and eventually becomes the official *Notaio* of various Capitani del Popolo and various offices in the Banchi de'Notari and the Biccherna. But he also had the good fortune to have come to Siena as a young man at the same time that "God drew forth into the world a new star…. the venerable Catherine."[21] "I held her and hold her in the greatest devotion," he writes, and decides after her death to translate her "Libro de la divina dottrina", better known today as her *Dialogo della divina provvidenza*, which he had penned as a scribe while Catherine dictated her ecstatic conversations with God: "an amazing thing, since from the time of Moses we have not seen God the Father speaking with anyone, save

18 Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: 2005), 69.

19 Agamben, *The Time that Remains*, 69.

20 Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: 1969), 255–56.

21 "Memorie di Ser Cristofano di Galgano Guidini da Siena, scritte da lui medesimo nel secolo XIV," *Archivio Storico Italiano* 4 (1843), 31.

for his son, the blessed Christ."[22] He goes on: "the aforesaid book [Catherine's *Dialogo*] was and is in the vernacular (volgare), and he who knows Latin and has been educated doesn't willingly read those things written in the vernacular, certainly not as much as they read things in [Latin] letters; thus for myself, and also for the good of others, I got to work and put it into Latin, faithfully and according to the text."[23] No sooner is his work done – a work that he is anxious to have checked by other experts, modest as he is about his abilities in Latin – than "Misser lo vescovo," most likely the Archbishop of Siena, begs Guidini to give the *Dialogo* to him so that he could share it in his own town, since "others would gain much more fruit from it if he carried it away with him, than if it remained with me."[24] Only once taken away from Guidini (who in any case still had "lo exemplo" or the original draft) could his translation bear fruit in the world and help "el prossimo" or the neighbors of whom Catherine so frequently spoke.

This idea of something – or someone – needing to leave home in order to bear fruit also runs through the brief preface preceding the translation of Birgitta's works, offering a strong reason for considering Guidini himself as its author. The opening sentences introduce us deftly to Birgitta's life, as the author refers three times to the Rome where Birgitta spent much of that life: "This is the book of Madonna Saint Birgitta of the kingdom of Sweden. And she was a princess, she had a husband and children, and remained a widow, and came to Rome, and went to the holy sepulcher and then returned, and left this life in Rome in 1373 on the 23rd of July, then she was canonized in Rome by Pope Boniface IX on the 7th day of October in 1391. To whom God gave marvelous revelations on many occasions and in many places, and through whom he prophesied marvelous things."[25] Thus does Guidini open his remarks by accentuating the

22 "Ebbi e ho in lei grandissima divozione … cosa mirabile, che da Moisé in qua non si truova che Dio Padre parlasse con persona, ma sì el Figliuolo Cristo Benedetto," "Memorie di Ser Cristofano di Galgano Guidini da Siena," 33.

23 "Perché el dicto libro era ed è per volgare, e chi sa gramatica o ha scienzia non legge tanto volontieri le cose che sono per volgare, quanto fa quelle per lettera; per me medesimo, e anco per utilità del prossimo, mossimi, e fecilo per lettera puramente secondo el testo….", "Memorie di Ser Cristofano di Galgano Guidini da Siena," 38.

24 "… e che molto più frutto n'arebbe el prossimo di là se 'l portava, che se rimanesse qua", "Memorie di Ser Cristofano di Galgano Guidini da Siena," 38.

25 "Questo è i'libro di madonna sancta Brigida del regno di Svetia. E fue principessa, ebbe marito e figluoli, e rimase vedova, e venne a Roma, e andò al sepolcro e poi tornò, e passò di questa vita in Roma nel m.ccc.lxxii adì xxiii di luglio, poi fu canonizata in Roma per papa Bonifatio nono adì vii d'octobre el m.ccc.lxxxxi. Alla quale Dio fece in piue tempi e in piue luoghi mirabili revelationi e profetizò mirabili cose." Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 67.

importance of Italy's and Catholicism's true center for Birgitta. She came to Rome, went to Jerusalem, and returned to the Holy City where she died – to then be canonized by Boniface IX. Boniface worked to restore autonomy both to Rome and to the papacy, fortifying the Castel Sant'Angelo and the bridges over the Tiber, and holding two jubilees during his pontificate, increasing the flow of pilgrims to the Holy City.

"Go to Rome.... you shall stay there until you see the supreme pontiff and the emperor there at the same time in Rome, and to them you shall announce my words."[26] Thus did Jesus command the widowed Birgitta, after she had spent two years in a convent following her husband's death. This is what we learn in the *Life of Birgitta*, written by Prior and Master Peter Olafsson. But towards the end of their preface of four folio pages, Birgitta's Italian translator tells a rather different story as to why Birgitta first came to Rome. He explicitly links her departure from Sweden to one of the three qualities a true prophet should possess. In providing such a list, Guidini was following Birgitta's later confessor and editor, Alfonso, in his so-called *Epistola soltarii* or The Hermit's Letter to Kings, where he mentions eight such characteristics. Guidini's three echo Alfonso's, including the third one: humility and patience ("essere humile e patiente").

Unlike Alfonso, however, Guidini takes a very different path when he describes what, exactly, constituted Birgitta's humility and patience. He speaks for several sentences of the many "reproaches and insults" ("ramorchi e dirisioni") to which she was subjected: "one person told her, you'd do better spinning fine (sottili) threads than speaking of these insidious (sottile) things."[27] And then it gets more serious. Birgitta was attacked as a princess and member of the royal class for having spoken the truth about the "captives" – the mistreatment of the "heathens" who converted during the Baltic crusades. Her criticisms led to her being persecuted, "and if they had seized her they would have done her much harm. And God commanded her to go to Rome."[28] Guidini then arrives at his own generalization regarding this turn of events:

26 From "The Life of Blessed Birgitta by Prior Peter and Master Peter," in *Birgitta of Sweden: Life and Selected Revelations*, par. 65; 92.

27 "uno diceva: tu faresti meglio a filare sottile che parlare di queste cose sottili", Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 70 – a charge that takes us back to Piero di Ser Mino accusing Birgitta of being a mere *femmina*. This is the only moment where Birgitta's gender is specifically mentioned in the preface.

28 "... fue perseguitata per modo se l'avessono ragionta harebbono fatto male. E Dio allora li comandò venisse a Roma," Pezzini, 70. The revelation of the Crusaders' mistreatment of the Baltic captives is in *Rev.* II:19, 99–100 "[The Crusaders] oppress them with hardships and deprive them of their liberties."

"One must flee persecution and leave off when continuing one's work is no longer useful."[29] So does God urge his disciples to flee one city for another in the event of persecution: "Thus go somewhere more useful" ("Cioé andate in luogho più utile") – a reference to Matthew 10:23: "When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next." Jesus himself had to flee, as did St. Paul from Damascus. Several centuries later, St. Benedict fled from his monks when they poisoned his communion wine, an incident recounted by Gregory the Great, who tells us that Benedict miraculously recognized that the wine was poisoned, and swiftly departed from the community of ungrateful, stubborn monks to go to the desert. As Gregory says – and as Guidini translates – "For where someone no longer/ finds himself able to do useful things, they must flee from that place and from persecution, and go somewhere where they are able to be more fruitful."[30]

"Piue fructificare" (more fruitful): we hear something along the same lines in the letter that another notary intrigued by the recently-deceased Birgitta, the Florentine Ser Lapo Mazzei, wrote in the early 1390s. Ser Lapo was eager to find a copy of Birgitta's *Revelations*, "her great book that she left the world," having heard that through Birgitta, Christ "intends to create a new vineyard that will bear fruit, and he'll plant it in good soil, with good vines and good workers."[31] While the implication is that the vineyard represents the "renovation of a Church that is unbearably broken," as Michele Lodone writes,[32] it is also a direct allusion to the opening words of Birgitta's rule, "Christ will plant a new vineyard because the old ones have been laid waste" (Prologue, Chapter 2). Both Lapo Mazzei and Guidini – not to mention others such as Petrarch, who had fought vigorously several decades earlier for the pope's return to Rome – believed that for Christianity and the Church to be "fruitful," the vineyard had to be in Italy. Guidini makes this explicit at the end of his section on Birgitta's life where he refers to a revelation from Book V, in which God explicitly says to a Birgitta still in Sweden that "This kingdom is mingled with great and long unpunished sin. This is why my words cannot yet shoot up and

29 "La persecutione si dè fuggire e cessare quando non si sa utile nel suo sostenere." Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 70.

30 "Che dove la persona non vede di potere fare utilità, debba tale persecutione e luogho rifuggire e ire dove possa piue fructificare"; Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 70. The phrase and the story about Benedict are from Gregory's *Dialogues* II.3.10.

31 "[Cristo] intende fare una vigna nuova che renda frutto, e farla in buona terra, di buoni vitigni, con buoni lavoratori ..."; cited in Lodone, "Santa Birgitta in Toscana," 70; from *Ser Lapo Mazzei. Lettere di un notaro a un mercante del secolo XIV*, ed. C. Guasti (Florence: 1880): I, 121–2. But the new vineyard may also turn out to be Birgitta's monastic order, Il Paradiso, on Tuscan soil – Piero di Ser Mino's final home.

32 Lodone, "Santa Birgitta in Toscana," 70.

bear fruit here.... They shall shoot up and bear fruit first elsewhere, until the hardness of the earth in this kingdom is broken up and mercy uncovered."[33] This "elsewhere," Guidini maintains ("Io entendo") is Rome: "it will begin to bear fruit in those places where the pope will start to live."[34] Guidini goes on to deepen this story of fertility, following Gregory as he places it in the context of the persecuted Jesus, Paul, and Benedict, founder of the monastic rule that would become the basis for Birgitta's own order. His Birgitta is *forced* to go elsewhere by hostile circumstances in her homeland: widowed, with disaster having struck the expedition for a "Crusade" in the Baltics, and when others lashed out against her for her criticism and her meddling. In this account, Christianity's flourishing depends on exile, on departures from one's home. Hence Guidini's translation acknowledges Birgitta's *new* home by bringing her words directly to her "fellow" citizens, words that can perhaps be fully realized only in 1399, with an Italian pope finally in Rome – in no small part because of the work Birgitta did.

But it is not just displacements of space that the patient prophet must suffer. There are displacements in time as well. After introducing the importance of humility, Guidini adds, "when they [prophesy] something that then doesn't happen, and not knowing why, they must humbly wait, believing that God has decided to delay."[35] "Debba aspettare": the need to wait comes to define not only the prophet, but the human condition itself with respect to the divine. In the first section of the preface focused on Birgitta's life, Guidini hones in repeatedly on the gap between the utterance of words and their fulfillment in works, citing sections of the *Revelations* such as *Rev.* II:17 that contains one of God's most explicit statements to Birgitta about revelations and their role in the world: they take time to be believed – and often will not be believed until they are fulfilled.[36] Alluding to *Rev.* II:17, Guidini observes, "first this writing must be announced, and then when the events take place it will certainly be believed, since all is made manifest by her friend."[37] He quotes his own

33 *Rev.* V: 12.

34 "cominciarà a fructare in quelli luoghi dove il papa comincerà ad essere". Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 69.

35 "quando dicesse una cosa e non venisse, e non sapendo la causa debba humilemente aspettare e credere che Dio ha voluto prorogare." Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 71.

36 Thus one example: Christ had to "grow and develop until a suitable time," and from "then on" his words were heard (*Rev.* II:17, 51) – words that nonetheless needed to be accompanied by deeds, as his miracles, death and resurrection made clear.

37 "prima questa scriptura si debba annuntiare, e poi venendo l'opere chiaramente lo serà creduto, perciò manifestansi per l'amico suo". Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 68.

translation of *Rev.* 1:55: "Thus says God: if they don't want to believe in these holy words, they will believe in the works once they occur."[38]

As Guidini conveys with his emphasis on patience, much of Birgitta's writings focus on the need to wait, on the lack of immediacy in the outpouring of divine truth and the time it takes for those truths to be fulfilled through events.[39] This is as much an acknowledgment of the fallibility of humans as of their medium of communication – and testifies to the infinite compassion of a divine figure who at every step is conscious of the limitations of their vulnerable yet stubborn creation. Mary becomes paradigmatic of the exemplary human being, who as mother, widow, and mourner constantly exhibited patience: the patience of waiting for a son's birth, the patience of waiting for her own death. Birgitta's emphasis throughout her works on the centrality of the Assumption – and her insistence that Mary, like Christ, possessed her body in heaven – drew the wrath of many who campaigned against her canonization, possibly seeing it as an attempt to raise the humble female to the level of Christ himself. As though she were responding to Birgitta's critics, Mary gives this account in *Revelations* 6 of her death and assumption, along with a rationale as to why her marvelous story is nowhere found in Scripture: "That my Assumption was not known to many persons was the will of God, my Son, in order that faith in His Ascension might first of all be firmly established in the hearts of men, for they were not prepared to believe in His Ascension, especially if my Assumption had been announced in the beginning" (Revelations VI:61:5–7; p. 124). As Mary pragmatically observes, those inclined to be skeptical of Jesus's resurrection would be even less accepting of her assumption. Hence the news of her glorious arrival into heaven was strategically delayed – a deferral that points not so much to Mary's secondary status as to an uncanny recognition of the slowness of human nature to embrace truth.

Prophecy itself is symptomatic of such limitations. Words take time not only to understand, but even to utter, involving what Guidini calls "prorogare" in his preface and Birgitta's editor Alfonso "mora" or "delay" in his *Epistola solitarii* ("The Hermit's Letter to Kings"). In a suggestive passage, Alfonso quotes Gregory the Great (Moralia 28:2) about a God who, not himself subject to temporalities, has a way of "intimating the things to be done and renders the

38 "Eccho, se dice Dio, se alle benigne parole non voglono credere credaranno all'opere quando verranno". Pezzini, "Il primo volgarizzamento," 68.

39 Birgitta's rule could be seen as the acknowledgment and practice of Birgitta's – and Mary's – patience. It becomes a way of acclimating oneself on a daily basis to the waiting that all humans perforce must do.

ignorant human heart suddenly knowledgeable about mysteries without the noise and the slowness of speech (tarditate sermonis)." As in the case of the discerning Birgitta, "God's locution to us is seen inwardly rather than heard. As he instils himself without the delay of speech (sine mora sermonis), he enlightens the shadows of our ignorance by his sudden light."[40] "Tarditate sermonis"; "sine mora sermonis": human forms of communication – hence speech itself – are characterized by their lack of instantaneity. God can bypass these human forms when choosing those to whom he imparts his own means of communication via "an incorporeal light that fills the interior and outwardly surrounds it once filled." Yet even if Birgitta may have experienced the totality of a revelation through the infusion of light – as in the divine truths contained in Book 5 that emerged from a single, sustained vision – she is well aware of the human fallibilities that necessitate slowness and delay. The desire for instantaneity is in fact nothing more than a diabolical wish, as we learn from the impatience of the scholastic figure posing questions of God throughout Book 5, such as "Why did you not cause all your words to be heard in a single moment"?[41] Humans are not made for the processing of too much, too soon, and their desire to know divine truths instantly is connected to the sin of pride.[42]

And yet, as Alfonso writes at the end of his *Epistola solitarii*, "tempus enim propre est" (7:8; Morris 41): the time is at hand, a line from the beginning of the Book of the Apocalypse (1:3). This echoes the preface written three decades earlier for the *Revelations* by Birgitta's Swedish confessor Master Mathias, who

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40 "The Hermit's Letter to Kings," 5:45–46, in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Morris, vol. 4, 30. See the Latin text: "45 Spiritum enim Dei quasi quedam nobis verba dicere est occulta vi ea que agenda sunt intimare et cor hominis ignarum, non adhibito strepitu et tarditate sermonis, peritum repente de absconditis reddere. 46 Et postea subiungit dicens: Dei enim locucio ad nos intrinsecus facta videtur pocius quam auditur, quia dum semetipsam sine mora sermonis insinuat, repentina luce nostre ignorancie tenebras illustrat. Hec ille Gregorius." http://www.umilta.net/bk13.html.

41 *Rev*. V:11, 2.

42 Much has been written on the temporal dynamics of Birgitta's work. See most recently Thomas Luongo's comments about the instantaneity of Birgitta's vision versus the process of textual composition, "God's Words, or Birgitta's? Birgitta of Sweden as Author," in *A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Maria H. Oen (Leiden: 2019), esp. 40–41. As for Birgitta's own sense of impatience as a vice to be avoided, see *Rev*. VI:6 in which, to cite the summary, "Christ gently rebukes the bride for some impatience she displayed and instructs her not to give in to anger or make any answer to people who provoke her until she has settled down and sees that her words can come to good effect" ("et videret posse proficere aliquid in verbis eius"). Here too there is an emphasis on patience and the ability to wait for a time when "words can come to good effect."

presented Birgitta "as the completion … of God's prior actions in history."[43] How did Birgitta's Italian translator fit his project into the framework of speaking and delay, of temporal and spatial displacements at a moment of apocalyptic hope, when the time is at hand and works are able to follow words, now that Rome is again at the center? It is worth reflecting on another moment from the *Revelations* that directly addresses the project of translation itself – and introducing it by way of the first publication of Birgitta's *Revelations*, in Lübeck in 1492. Book VII ends with the account of Birgitta's death in Rome along with the directive Christ gave her regarding her manuscript. Immediately following, and across from the opening page of Alfonso's *Epistola solitarii*, is an illustration very different from the other folio-size woodcuts in the Lübeck edition (Figure 2.1). Those woodcuts generally feature Birgitta seated on a throne directly beneath Mary and Jesus, presenting to various audiences her words: kings, queens, nobles, cardinals, popes, and the populace at large. Here too, she presents her words in the form of an open book, but to a single figure, and only after raising herself up from her chair – Alfonso himself, who extends his open hands to receive the text. It is a moving gesture, Birgitta's consigning of her manuscript to another in preparation for her imminent death. The engraver has taken care to make Birgitta an elderly woman, hunched over as she slowly moves toward the expectant Alfonso.

Above the two is a passage cited is from the well-known 49th revelation of the *Extravagant Revelations*, in which Christ compares himself to a carpenter – and then proceeds to say that after he has made a beautiful image (fabricat ymagine pulcram), he hands it over to friends, who will make it even more beautiful: "I am like a carpenter who cuts wood from the forest and carries it home, then carves a beautiful image and adorns it with colors and contours. His friends see that the image can be adorned with still more beautiful colors, and so they paint it with their own colors. I, God, cut words from the forest of my divinity and placed them in your heart. My friends edited and arranged them in books, coloring and adorning them according to the grace given them."[44] Christ likens Birgitta's revelations to his own words, which his friends fashioned into books that they decorated and illuminated. And like Christ's words, Birgitta's revelations will be translated into "many languages" (pluribus linguis) as soon as she gives them to Alfonso: "Now in order to adapt them to several languages, give all these books containing revelations of my words to

43 Anders Piltz, "Birgitta and the Bible," in *A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Oen, 57.
44 *Rev.* VIII: 49, 1–3.

FIGURE 2.1 Bernardino Pinturicchio, *Pius II canonizes St. Catherine of Siena, June 29, 1461*, *c.*1508. The Piccolomini Linrary, south west wall, Santa Maria della Scala (Duomo), Siena

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my bishop hermit [Alfonso]).”[45] These many languages include, of course, the Latin language in which Alfonso wrote and the Lübeck Birgitta “speaks.”[46]

As Claire Sahlin has noted, this image of a Birgittine text that is modified, adorned, and ‘translated’ offsets the many instances in which God speaks directly to Birgitta: “[it] is one of only very few passages from the Birgittine corpus that clearly admits the editorial license of the confessors.”[47] She goes on to say that this late revelation (Cyprus, 1372) was not even placed by Alfonso himself in the text; it was found in his Breviary only after his death and included in later manuscripts as the 49th extravagant revelation. The Lübeck edition, however, makes it central rather than peripheral to the text’s generation. It accentuates the process not only of collaboration, but of the displacement that Birgitta experienced in her lifetime and would experience again with her writings: she parts, necessarily, with her writings, so they can be reformatted and translated into Latin.

Even if the Lübeck illustration is somewhat exceptional, it nonetheless creates the same layering effect as that found in some earlier manuscript versions of the Latin text, described by Maria Oen in a recent article. Oen tracks the manuscript images of Birgitta from the foundational copies of the *Revelations* from late 14th-century Naples, as well as some of the earliest translations, and makes an interesting find based on the comparison between Latin and vernacular versions. If the Latin *Revelations* fashions Birgitta’s authorship as highly mediated – her ecstatic vision is one link in a chain that goes from God and Mary to her confessors, translators, and scribes, and ultimately to multiple audiences – the vernacular manuscripts tend to depict her in a simpler and more straightforward relationship to God, beginning with that of Guidini.[48] To return to Guidini’s Italian translation, the tenth folio page completes the prefatory letter of Birgitta’s confessor Matthias, closing with the rubric “Finisce el prolago del libro delle celestiagli rivelationi di Dio.” Immediately below is an illumination that occupies roughly two-thirds of the page, showing us

45 *Rev.* VIII: 49, 4.

46 The (abridged) passage ends clarifying that “Alphonso heremite” will take over the work of “capturing the Catholic sense of my spirit” (“elucidet catholicum sensum spiritus mei teneat”), *Rev.* VIII: 48, 4.

47 Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, 32.

48 See Maria H. Oen, “Ambivalent Images of Authorship,” in which she suggests that the image creates a parallel between Birgitta and biblical *auctores*, in *Sanctity and Female Authorship*, ed. Oen and Falkeid, 122. Oen makes a more elaborate case for the Sienese illustration in an earlier essay, “The Iconography of *Liber celestis revelacionum*,” in *A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Oen, 186–222, where she notes that “vernacular portraits tend to depict [Birgitta] writing” (207) and that the Sienese illustration in particular emphasizes authorial agency (210).

Birgitta sitting at a desk with pen, ink, and manuscript while Jesus bursts the frame, as he speaks to her from above. Placed literally at the entryway into her own text, following the translator's preface and a much-abridged version of Matthias's life of Birgitta, this image presents the act of writing as a form of immediacy.[49] And it is an immediacy connected to the maternal tongue of Birgitta herself. Never comfortable in Latin, as we hear numerous times throughout the *Revelations* and learn from her confessors, Birgitta must be writing in Swedish – and Jesus is therefore speaking Swedish to her as well.[50] Even if the delay of speech is always perforce an issue, we are nonetheless enabled to see the process by which those without Latin can hear God directly, in their mother tongue. Visually, Guidini thus becomes one of the first to reject the iconography of the mediators who fashioned their own "more beautiful" image, in order to emphasize the direct link between the voice of divinity and Birgitta's receptive pen.[51] Below the image is the opening of the *Revelations*, introduced with the rubric "Comincia el primo libro dele celestiagli revelationi di Dio." We thus come to the "parole del nostro signore" through the imposing figure of Birgitta herself. The immediacy is now.

Such an image seems to confirm Guidini's translation as the product of spontaneity as it represents a return to a mother tongue and the instantaneity of God's word. Translation into Italian perhaps paradoxically enables revelation to come to fruition and to be even more fully and widely understood, as Christ's and Mary's words – and hence Birgitta's – arguably regain their spoken status as a "volgare." It thus brings to an end the saga of Birgitta's displacement and exile that Guidini underlines in the final section of his prologue. But it is also dependent on the work performed as a result of that exile, as the project of Italian translation becomes one more step, and hopefully the final

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49 Such images of Birgitta's transcription of her dialogues with Jesus and Mary are found in the Lübeck edition as well, but only in the small miniatures that open the first chapter of several books, such as that for the First Book of the *Revelations*. This smaller image is outsized by the folio page to the left, which shows Birgitta presenting her text to an audience of royalty and religious figures, as well as more humble readers.

50 See the passage from the canonization materials for Birgitta, *Acta et processus canonizacionis b. Birgitte*, ed. Isak Collijn (Uppsala: 1924–31), 84. English transalation from Bridget Morris, "General Introduction," in *Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden*, ed. Morris, Vol. 1, 12: "The words that were given her from God she wrote down in her mother tongue with her hand when she was well and she had us, her father confessors, make a very faithful translation of them into Latin."

51 Of relevance here may be Grace M. Jantzen's point about Hildegard of Bingen, who also transcribed (albeit in Latin) the words she received from God two centuries earlier: "In hearing God's voice, Hildegard is finding her own." Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: 1995), 171.

step, toward realizing the new climate of a Rome-centered papacy – despite the schism – that allows Birgitta's words along with those of her heavenly interlocutors to be heard and acted upon more completely than before. And finally, these words are anchored in the language through which the Sienese woman of recent memory, Caterina Benincasa, wrote and spoke, preached and prayed. The *volgare* was the means through which Catherine communicated with Guidini, Caffarini, and all those whose lives she touched and tried to reform, from popes to prostitutes. This is a Catherine "who had no concern as to whether she offended or pleased", as Guidini wrote in his "Memorie". Whether she was writing to Pope Urban VI, to Cardinals, or to Queen Giovanna, "she revealed the truth in full".[52] This openness to truth, this indifference to others' reactions to her words, is the same reason that Birgitta encountered hostility in her native Sweden – and was forced to leave for Rome.[53] Such dangerous directness of speech is now arguably recovered, while the fruits of that speech are fully realized.

Such are the suggestive resonances between the books of Catherine and Birgitta in the career of the Sienese Guidini, a notary and follower of Catherine who went on to dedicate himself to the Spedale, the Compagnia della Vergine Maria, and his *prossimo* or neighbor. This back-and-forth between Latin and Italian as exemplified in his Latin translation of Catherine's *Dialogo* and his oversight and possible Italian translation of Birgitta's *Revelations* attests to Guidini's efforts to ensure that the writings of both women occupied two worlds, making them eminently more fruitful in precisely the place and time they are most needed, the time for which they were, finally intended. But at the turn of the 15th century, the wait was over. Thanks to the immense project of the Italian translation, one can hear Birgitta's words as they were meant to be heard: in the language of her hosts, in the language of Rome's pope, in the language of Siena's Catherine.

52 "non curava di dispiacere o di piacere"; "diceva la verità in palese," "Memorie di Ser Cristofano di Galgano Guidini da Siena," 36 and 37.

53 On women and the vernacular in the late medieval and early modern periods, see Katherine Gill's seminal article "Women and the Production of Religious Literature in the Vernacular, 1300–1500," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. E. Ann Matter (Philadelphia: 1994), 64–85; and Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, "Puellae litteratae: The use of the vernacular in the Dominican Convents of Southern Germany," in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Toronto: 1997), 49–70.

### Catherine's Epistles: Coming Home

Much had changed by the time Aldo Manuzio published the first complete edition of Catherine's letters, six years after the publication in Lübeck of Birgitta's complete works. By then Catherine too was canonized, after a delay no doubt informed by the very schism that the pope's return to Rome had precipitated. If Birgitta may have been behind Caffarini's attempts to make Catherine a saint, Catherine no longer needed Birgitta in the year 1500. By then Catherine too was canonized, capable of standing, as she stands in the flyleaf to Aldus's volume, quite by herself. By then, too, Aldus was well underway with his humanist project to publish Greek and Latin texts in their original languages. Just as he called attention to Catherine's letters as having been "hidden" by divine intent until the moment is right, he called on similar ideas a year earlier in his dedication of his first publication of a Latin text, Firmicus's *Astronomica* (October 1499). Here he suggests that these pages have "lain hidden (iacuerint) for so many centuries, mutilated and covered in filth," and brought back to life through his strenuous labors.[54] Several months after the publication of Catherine's letters, Aldus brought out the first volume of Latin Christian poets, including a Prudentius who "had lain hidden (delituisset) for eleven hundred years and more, so that this author may be of benefit to his fellow Christians."[55] Aldus's description of a humanist enterprise that makes us all better citizens and brings light to dark times – much as he brings Latin works out of darkness – hinges on the arrival of long-delayed, long-awaited words and putting them to use to advance humankind. Thus does Aldus fulfill the work of bringing his authors home – such as the astronomer Maternus, who returns from the land of the Getae, "complete and unimpaired," to "look again upon his kinsmen and his native land."[56]

Catherine too, in a way, is coming home, and by way of a translation: the translation of her letters and, more broadly, of the vernacular itself into a humanist context. The full-page illustration of Catherine found on f.10 immediately before the "Epistole utile e devote de la Beata e Seraphica Vergine Sancta Catharina da Siena" presents Catherine no longer as the *Madonna del popolo* seen in 15th-century images of female sanctity, but standing tall like a humanist author (Figure 2.2). Moreover, in this image of an imposing and

54 Manutius, *The Greek Classics*, 3–5.

55 "cum iam mille et centum annis et plus eo delituisset," Manutius, *The Greek Classics*, 10–11.

56 Manutius, *The Greek Classics*, 4–5. Of course it is Aldus, effectively, who has brought the works of the astronomers "from the netherworld" into the light of day ("ab inferos ad superos," 2–3). His reference to Catherine is less focused on himself: she has come into the light because of God's intervention.

solitary Catherine, we have a fascinating balancing act between Latin and vernacular texts. Catherine holds a heart "signed" with the name "iesus", while in her right hand she clasps an open book on which we have, in Italian, the way that she typically signed her own vernacular letters, in Jesus's name: *gesu dolce, gesu amore*. As has long been observed, this is the first use of the italic font in the history of print – a humanist font Aldus would famously use in his *libri tascabili* of Virgil, Dante, and Petrarca. Less observed is that the handwriting on book and heart is the same: is it Catherine's, or Christ's? Moreover, there is obviously more Latin surrounding Catherine than just Jesus's name. We have a line from Psalm 50 ("Cor mundum crea in me Deus"), as well as three lines of a poem written by Pius II himself, uncle of the volume's dedicatee, for Catherine's canonization. Catherine's Italian, now available thanks to Aldus's publication, is balanced against the Latinity of the papacy, the Vulgate, and Jesus himself as though it was being constructed as a language "comparable" to Latin in the sense that Paul Ricoeur discussed in his lectures on translation.[57] Might Aldus be intimating that this was a negotiation Catherine was capable of making herself, vindicating her mother tongue – its immediacy as well as its validity – as the *donna* and *mulier* are shown to be one and the same, as in the account of the "miracolo" of Piero di Ser Mino's rescue from imminent death? Within two years Aldus would publish Dante and Petrarch's vernacular works, thereby suggesting the capacity of Italian to be subject to the same philological rigor and to convey the same authority as Latin. Pietro Bembo, who collaborated with Aldus on the editions of Dante in 1502 and Petrarch in 1503, has been called "the founder of vernacular philology" ("il fondatore della filologia volgare") precisely because of that collaboration.

But one might also argue that the path began with Catherine's *Epistolario*.[58] Finally, there is the more immediate context to consider. As Marina Zancan notes, Aldus's "decision [to publish] the letters is … entwined within religious, moral, and political concerns".[59] As mentioned earlier, Catherine's work was published at a time of crisis, not only for the apocalyptic sensibilities inspired

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57 See Paul Ricoeur, *On Translation*, trans Eileen Brennan (New York: 2006), particularly the third essay where he discusses "the construction of comparables" as a goal of translation, 36–8.

58 See Carlo Dionisotti, *Scritti sul Bembo*, ed. Claudio Vela (Turin: 2002), 81.

59 "La scelta delle lettere è … tutta interna ad una preoccupazione religiosa, morale, politica." See Marina Zancan, *Il doppio itinerario della scrittura* (Turin: 1998), 121. See Giulia Barone, "Society and Women's Religiosity, 750–1450," on the extent to which medieval women such as Catherine and Birgitta were seen as acting "in a deeply and completely 'political' way", in *Women and Faith*, ed. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge: 1999), 69. For a more sustained look at the political motivations of both women, see Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested*.

FIGURE 2.2 School of Lippo Vanni(?), *Miniature author portrait of Saint Birgitta*, after 1399. Biblioteca comunale degli Intronati, I.V.25, fol. 11v
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by the arrival of a new century, but for the more immediate threats of ongoing civil unrest and the Turkish presence, all the more challenging for Venetians. In their essay in this volume, Jessica Goethals and Anna Wainwright call attention to the use of Birgitta's prophetic voice to bring Italians to their senses. As they note, only in 1484 were Birgitta's *Revelations* officially brought into the canon as Pope Sixtus IV overturned earlier prohibitions against their dissemination. The result "strengthened Birgitta's appeal as a mouthpiece for other

political prophecies," leading to the publication of pamphlets that ventriloquized Birgitta's voice in the call to bring order to the peninsula in the wake of the Italian wars. Birgitta thus spoke to Italian readers in their *lingua materna* through a range of "Profezie di S. Brigida" published in Florence in the 1470s and 80s, in Venice in 1493 and in Rome at the end of the century.[60]

Our Sienese notary began to make this possible a century earlier with his translation. In effect, Guidini validates for Birgitta if not her own *lingua materna*, then the importance of the vernacular itself, via an Italian language closer than Birgitta's Swedish to the Latin in which her works circulated throughout Europe. It is also a way of giving what Ricoeur calls "linguistic hospitality"[61] to Birgitta in a way that matches the physical hospitality she received in Rome, Naples, and elsewhere during the period in which she was in exile. Indeed, stressing this exilic dimension underlines Italy's openness to this persecuted *femmina* who becomes a *donna* in the death vision of Piero di Ser Mino and in others' works as well – thanks to the opportunities Italy gave her to speak freely and to escape the belittling and criticism she experienced when living among the Swedish nobility. At the same time, Guidini recognized the importance of dignifying his *own* vernacular by incorporating Birgitta into the Italian – and Sienese – canon. As he makes her work available to his fellow *disciplinati* in the Compagnia della Vergine Maria, he also attests to what had long been Siena's pride in its tongue as a discourse for civic matters in particular, as codified in its constitution of 1309, the first civic constitution in Europe in a vulgar tongue. This too sets the stage for what emerges as Aldus's new project with respect to the vernacular after the publication of Catherine's letters. Petrarch and Dante were both exiles – one more figuratively, to be sure, than the other – for whom Aldus found a home in the publications of his new-found industry. Catherine had been exiled in a different way, given the difficulties of accessing her letters. Now she too can emerge and be welcomed into the home Aldus has created for her – much as Guidini created such a home for Birgitta a century earlier.

60 In an atmosphere characterized by an attitude of seizing the moment – coming to grips with the immediacy of words written centuries ago, in the context of a new technology that made those words widely and quickly available – this lingua materna would take on increasing importance, as no one knew better than Martin Luther. Luther initially found Birgitta to be a stimulus to his reforms, but decided eventually that she was too retrograde in her attachment to the papacy. See André Vauchez on Birgitta's failure to represent enough of a break with the old order to be of much value for the Reformation. André Vauchez, *Saints, Prophètes et Visionnaires: Le pouvoir surnaturel au Moyen Age* (Paris: 1999): "l'eschatologie d'Hildegarde reste traditionnnelle sur bien des plans," 117 and elsewhere.

61 Ricoeur, *On Translation*, esp. 23.

To return to where we began: if the Florentine chancellor Piero di Ser Mino saw Birgitta and humanism as incommensurable, Aldus sought to place the "new Birgitta" – a Catherine made prophetess and *mulier*, equivalent with the Latinate tradition – onto the same plane. The recognition of dignity, as Piero grasped as he lay dying, is a function of time – in his case, of that moment *in extremus*. Aldus too glimpsed in the apocalyptic year of 1500 the possibility of such extremes. In bringing Catherine fully into the present, he makes her the prophet and spokesperson for responding to Italian disunity so as to better counter the threat of Islam. This is a project in which the dedicatee of the letters, Cardinal Francesco Piccolomini, would have been fully complicit.

Such is readily apparent in the chapel that Piccolomini dedicated to his uncle, Pope Pius II, in Siena's Duomo. While the chapel was completed by Pinturicchio only after Piccolomini's death (a mere ten days after his coronation as Pius III), it was commissioned and planned for much earlier, as Piccolomini designed the library devoted to Pius II's long and remarkable life, from humanist and ambassador to cardinal and pope. Pius II's relatively short papacy (seven years) is celebrated in the closing two images, and they are telling ones: Catherine's canonization in 1461, and Pius II's arrival in Ancona, from which he had planned to depart for a Crusade against the Ottomans – only to be prevented by his untimely death. In the scene of the canonization, Catherine, head and body reunited,[62] lies below the enthroned Pius II, her closed eyes turned in the direction of the final fresco, which features Pius's arrival in Ancona and what was to have been his triumphant crusade toward the east. Her bodily alignment with Pius's gathering of troops suggestively connects the project in which she was such a fervent believer to the urgency of which Aldus speaks in his letter to Piccolomini: the worth of her words could be recognized and acted on only at the beginning of the Cinquecento. So is the body of the *donna* recovered and restored to wholeness, whether through the imposing *mulier* who appears in Aldus's volume, or the saintly figure directing our gaze towards Pius II's Crusade in Siena's Duomo. While Catherine may have spoken prophetically to the humanist pope who canonized her eighty years after her death, Aldus offers his readers another chance to hear her now.

62 Sienese viewers would have been well aware that Catherine's head had been detached from her body several years after her death in Rome, and brought to Siena; it was placed in a chapel in the Church of San Domenico, barely a kilometer from the Duomo.