

BRIDGET MORRIS

## Vadstena Scribes

In ANF 107 1992, pp. 206–239, Lars Wollin wrote a review article of my edition of Book V of St Birgitta's Revelations in Medieval Swedish. (*Book V of St Birgitta's Uppenbarelsen*. Edited from MS Cod. Ups. C61. Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskrift-sällskapet. Häfte 260, band 80. Lund 1991.) MS C61, although the youngest of all the Brigittine manuscripts in Medieval Swedish, represents an early stage in the history of the Swedish text and is thus one of the most important manuscripts of the Swedish tradition. It is typical of other manuscripts emanating from the Vadstena school around 1500 but it is also distinctive in many ways: the hand is idiosyncratic; the manuscript is a compilation and seems to have come into lay ownership at an early date; and its later history is different from that of other Vadstena manuscripts. There are also other features of interest which raise more general issues on the language, orthography and the nature of the translation. I welcome the opportunity here to respond to two of the specific points Wollin makes, and to add to his discussion of some of the general issues relating to this manuscript.

First, the section "Scribal Error" in my Introduction (pp. 10–14) dealt with all categories of errors and emendations, regardless of their type or origin. Wollin (p. 211) argues that the discussion ought to have identified the scribe's mistakes on the one hand and the changes made by the corrector on the other hand. The corrector makes a considerable number of changes in the MS, and he endeavours to make the text readable and intelligible; he probably did not slavishly follow an exemplar, although he does appear to be concerned to restore certain conservative linguistic features, while ignoring others. On the role of the Vadstena correctors there is certainly scope for further work. While Wollin develops an interesting picture of the corrector of C61, I should point out that in some cases it is impossible to distinguish unequivocally between the scribe's and the corrector's emendations, and there is an indeterminate area of interlocking between scribe and corrector. This is made clear in most pages of the edition, where all doubtful primary readings are marked as "Probably<sup>a</sup>" and all doubtful secondary readings as "Probably<sup>b</sup>".<sup>1</sup> The difficulties of distinguishing between the scribe's and the

<sup>1</sup> As far as it is possible to tell, the corrections were made by only one corrector, with the exception of p. 552 line 14 (int. 6.1), where *stool* was replaced by *stiga* by a different hand. See Ståhle 1956, 13.

corrector's marks are further illustrated in the use of punctuation (which was not discussed in depth in the edition; see p. 10). In many parts of the manuscript the punctuation is in fainter ink than the ink of the script itself. This may be because the scribe altered the position of the pen when writing the punctuation or added the punctuation at a later time (but if this was the case she left little space between words to give room for the virgule to be added). In the last six pages (634–39), however, there is hardly any punctuation at all: on p. 635 there are seven virgules, on 636 there are five, on 637 there are three and on the remaining pages, 634, 638, 639, there is none. In these pages there are almost no corrector's emendations either, where some might be expected (p. 635 line 18 *Tholandhe lamb och tholande* cf. MS Cod. Holm. A5a [designated B] *tholande lamb ok ey tholande* Latin *agnus paciens et non paciens*; p. 638 line 6 *han skall wardha klaar till gwdz hedher* cf. B *han skal vardha kar till gudz hedhir* Latin *erit vas in honorem meum*). The absence of punctuation on the pages where there is also an absence of corrections raises the possibility that the corrector, and not the scribe, was responsible for the punctuation in the manuscript. The employment of punctuation has been discussed recently by M. B. Parkes who observes a lack of enthusiasm for inserting punctuation in early monastic tradition, and suggests that punctuation was often minimised to encourage the reader to discover the meaning of the text for himself.<sup>2</sup>

On the question of the idiosyncracies of the scribe's language – as distinct from the corrector's language – a matter for further speculation is to explain why the orthography of the manuscript is not correspondingly as conservative as the morphology, lexicon and syntax. One explanation for the incongruity between the nature and form of the language might be that the scribe did not see the text she was copying from and was writing a text which was read aloud to her. There are a number of errors which are difficult to explain as visual errors, and although they might be interpreted as the result of acoustic copying, by which a visual reminiscence of a word in the exemplar is turned into an aural one in the scribe's mind, they remain perplexing.<sup>3</sup> For example: 8.12 *syäll B skäl* Latin *racione*; rev. 9.4 *mördha B mödha* Latin *sollicitari*; 10.21 *wärzlzskyllelegha B värddh skyllellica* Latin *merito*; 13.13 *hämpdh B hänt* Latin *accidencia*; rev. 13.18 *klaar B kar* Latin *vas*. There is little evidence for the practice of dictation in Scandinavia. Seip claims that it was unlikely in monastic schools in the early Middle Ages; Löfkvist suggests

<sup>2</sup> Parkes 1992, 17f.

<sup>3</sup> Chaytor 1941, 51, cites an example from *L'Hystore Job*, a French translation of the Latin *Compendium* by Peter of Blois, in which the scribe wrote *et* three times instead of *est*. The editor explains the mistakes thus: "le scribe, *en copiant, se prononçait à lui-même* les mots et ainsi, en quelque sorte, *écrivait comme si quelqu'un les lui dictait, en effet; il voyait est, il entendait le son approximatif d'e fermé, il écrivait et, les deux mots ayant, à cette époque, très probablement le même son.*" (Editor's italics.)

that some legal and diplomatic texts in the fourteenth century may have been written by dictation, and Brøndum-Nielsen argues that the types of mistakes in the earliest Danish Bible translation, which dates from the late fifteenth century, are suggestive of the practice.<sup>4</sup> My conjecture for the production of this manuscript is that its exemplar was one of the oldest books at Vadstena, a book not readily lent out for copying, and that it was dictated to one or more scribes, who were producing copies for use at the monastery or for lay use. By this process, the older linguistic forms of the exemplar were preserved but the copyist adopted her own spelling practice; and the punctuation was added at a later stage, perhaps at the same time as the text was elucidated by the corrector. The mass production of books by hand at Vadstena may have been considered important around 1500: the *Diarium Vadstenense* tells how many of the sisters and brethren died of a plague which attacked Sweden in 1495 and in the same year the newly installed printing press was destroyed by fire, together with a container of seven volumes of Birgitta's revelations. Furthermore, the abbess Anna Fickesdotter, who was elected on 20 February 1501, is said to have been "very booklearned" and she may have emphasised and encouraged intellectual and scribal activities at the monastery.<sup>5</sup>

My second point is that Wollin argues that the attempt to trace the source of the Swedish translation from within the extant Latin MSS should have started with the assumption that it would be found within the *sigma* group, which includes the manuscripts emanating from Vadstena, and thus to search among the other manuscript groups was futile. Certainly with the benefit of hindsight, and after the other manuscript groups had been investigated and subsequently discounted, this assumption would seem reasonable; as indeed it was suggested in the edition on p. 51 n. 24 "K . . . was written at Vadstena at the end of the fourteenth century; the other 'Vadstena' MSS containing Book V are F . . . and U. A number of separative errors (e.g. 14.20 *innocenciam recuperandam* [K *innocenciam temperandum*] M *menlöso ath-erfaa* certifies that the Swedish translation was not derived directly from any of these MSS, but since they were among the standard MSS at the monastery, it is possible that the translation is closely related to one of them." In view of the idiosyncratic nature of the translation, with many sentences abridged, it was especially important to investigate the other manuscript groups; and to have concentrated exclusively on the *sigma* group, as Wollin argues I should have done, would have left open the possibility, however remote, that the source lay outside this group: "thus do we . . . by indirections find directions out".

<sup>4</sup> Seip 1958, Löfvist 1976, 52, Brøndum-Nielsen 1934. In general on dictation see Root 1913, Bennett 1947, Hajnal 1959, Eisenstein 1979, 11, 70, 524, 698.

<sup>5</sup> See Gejrot 1988, 279, 284, 300.

## Bibliography

- Bennett, H. S., 1947: "The Production and Dissemination of Vernacular MSS in the Fifteenth Century", *The Library* 5, ser. 1, pp. 167–178. London.
- Brøndum-Nielsen, J., 1934: "Om middelalderlig Nedskrivning efter Diktat", *Studier tilegnede Verner Dahlerup*, pp. 63–66. Copenhagen.
- Chaytor, H. J., 1941: "The Medieval Reader and Textual Criticism", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 26, pp. 49–56. Manchester.
- Eisenstein, E., 1979: *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*. Cambridge.
- Gejrot, C. (ed.), 1988: *Diarium Vadstenense. The Memorial Book of Vadstena Abbey*. (Studia Latina Stockholmensia 33.) Stockholm.
- Hajnal, I., 1959: *L'Enseignement de l'écriture aux universités médiévales*. Budapest.
- Löfkvist, J.-E., 1976: *Svenskan i latinska originaldiplom 1300–1325: en studie i medeltida skrivvanor*. (Studia Philologiae Scandinavicae Upsaliensia 9.) Uppsala.
- Parkes, M. B., 1992: *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West*. Aldershot.
- Root, R. K., 1913: "Publication before Printing", *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 28, pp. 417–31.
- Seip, D. A., 1958: "Diktat", *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder* vol. 3 col. 77. Copenhagen.
- Ståhle, C. I., 1956: "Ett fragment av den fornsvenska Birgittaöversättningen", *KVHAAH. Filologiskt Arkiv* 2. Stockholm.