Poetry in Hildegard of Bingen: A Study on the Biblical Roots of the Ordo Virtutum[1]

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Resum

Els estudis sobre el tipus de versificació que l'abadessa mística renana Hildegarda de Bingen (1098 –1179) emprava a les seves obres són escadussers, i encara ho són més quan fan referència al seu *Ordo Virtutum* o l'*Orde de les Virtuts*, un dels melodrames llatins més destacables de l'edat mitjana, escrit *ca.* el 1151. Aquest article pretén omplir aquest buit i oferir, d'una banda, una descripció precisa del tipus de versificació que trobem en els versos lliures de l'*Ordo Virtutum*, molt propers, com veurem, a la poesia hebrea bíblica; de l'altra, estudiar aquelles imatges líriques bíbliques del text per tal de palesar, d'aquesta manera, el rerafons bíblic que presenta, a tots els nivells, aquest melodrama.

Paraules clau: *Ordo Virtutum*, drama, versificació, neumes, psicomàquia.

Abstract

The studies on the type of versification that the Rhenish abbess and mystic Hildegard of Bingen (1098-11179) used in her works are scarce, and even more so those specifically devoted to her Ordo Virtutum or Order of the Virtues, one of the most outstanding Latin melodramas of the Middle Ages, written around 1151. This article aims to fill this void. On the one hand it will offer a precise description of the type of metre that can be found in the free verses of the Ordo Virtutum, which, as will be shown, are very close to Hebrew biblical poetry; on the other hand, it will discuss the biblical lyrical images of the text in order to show the biblical background that pervades this melodrama.

Key Words: *Ordo Virtutum*, drama, versification, neumes, psychomachia.

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[1] This article is the result of scholarly research into the text and music of the *Ordo Virtutum*, an investigation that has lasted several years, and the results of which will soon be published in the form of a new critical edition and study (see Eulàlia and Mariona Vernet in press). This critical edition of the Ordo, to be published in 2018 by Publicacions de la Universitat de Barcelona, offers the reader for the first time the Catalan translation of the Latin text and a thorough study of the work from multiple perspectives: philological, codicological, literary and musical. The Latin edition of the text has been produced jointly by Mariona and Eulàlia Vernet, both philologists and singers from the medieval music group *Ardit Ensemble*, Universitat de Barcelona, which has been performing the *Ordo Virtutum* for some years now.

Introduction

The poetic and prosodic resources that the Rhenish mystic abbess Hildegard of Bingen (Bermersheim 1098 - Rupertsberg 1179) employed in her works are scarce, and even scarcer when we are dealing with her *Ordo Virtutum* or *Order of the Virtues*, one of the most remarkable Latin dramas of the Middle Ages, written ca. 1151.[2] Besides Hildegard's music and versification, works on the Latin language used by the *magistra* are scarce. Throughout the first third of the 20th century, the Latin verses of the *Ordo Virtutum*, as well as those of the *Symphonia*—her collection of hymns and antiphons—were severely criticised by German and English philologists who, from an excessively strict, purist and closed perspective, considered that her verses deviated from the medieval literary canon and, therefore, were of little literary value. Even English scholars specialising in medieval liturgical drama inexplicably ignored in their works the pre-eminent value of such an unusual and extraordinary piece as the *Ordo Virtutum* (P. Dronke 1970b: 150-151; E. A. Davidson 1984: 495; L. Ferris 2012: 8-9).

Fortunately, from the 1970s onwards, and thanks to the studies of Peter Dronke (1970)—considered the father of modern Hildegardian studies—Hildegard's music and verse began to be reassessed, in accordance with the value that such a pre-eminent work deserves. Since then, two generations of scholars have begun to release her poetic and musical oeuvre from this past burden and to reposition it in academic studies in its rightful place: at the forefront of medieval Latin dramas (L. Ferris 2012: 8).

Language in the *Ordo Virtutum,* praised by scholars such as Peter Dronke, attests to Hildegard's special gift for bringing to light, through verse, very powerful poetic images of deeply spiritual content which, together with music, have the capacity to transcend the soul into the heavenly realm of the Virtues. This is, in my opinion, one of the most powerful features of the *Ordo Virtutum.* Because of all these characteristics, the study and analysis of the Hildegardian text will necessarily be incomplete if one does not also study the music that accompanies it, and the other way round: the music of the *Ordo Virtutum* must necessarily be understood from the point of view of the text, so rich in imagery and spirituality.[3]

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[2] Although the date of composition of this drama set to music is not yet clear, there is nevertheless a consensus that the *terminus ante quem* is set at the year 1151, at which time Hildegard herself indicates that she completed her *Liber Scivias*. As for the editions of the melodrama published up to now, see especially the edition of the Corpus Christianorum by Peter Dronke (2007), an also the editions by Maura Böckeler and Pudentiana Barth (1927), Audrey E. Davidson (1985), Bernward Konermann (1991) and Laura Ricossa (2013).

[3] In this respect, it is necessary to revisit the idea of Barbara Newman (1987: 29), according to which, on a spiritual level, Hildegard's language-music duality is equivalent to the body-soul binomial; in the *Ordo Virtutum*, music has the power to reinvigorate a text that is rich in imagery and metaphor. When the music and the verses of this musical drama are heard, then the text comes alive and the work is presented in all its splendour and depth. Recently, research into Hildegard's music has received a new impulse thanks to the contribution of Barbara Stühlmeyer, who has edited her musical works in Vatican notation (2012), as well as the various articles on Hildegard's music. The first edition in modern notation of the score of the *Ordo Virtutum* dates from 1927 and is entitled *Der heiligen Hildegard von Bingen Reigen der Tugenden*. This edition, with one of the best forewords ever written, was made by the Benedictine nuns M. Böckeler and P. Barth. However, Sister Pudentiana Barth takes too many liberties with the

1. The *Ordo Virtutum*

From the second half of the 20th century onwards, the *Ordo Virtutum* is considered one of the best surviving medieval dramas (see O. Ursprung 1958-1961:943, A. E. Davidson 1984: 495 and R. Potter 1992:31, among others). It is a unique work in the context of 12th century medieval drama, in terms of language, versification, structure, content and, of course, music.[4]

Although this play is one of a group of remarkable dramas written in Latin and in the vulgar language during the second half of the 12th century in Europe, such as the *Mystère d'Adam* or the *Seinte Resurreccion*, in the Anglo-Norman context, or the *Ludus de Antichristo* in German-speaking territories, the *Ordo* is not similar to them, given its uniqueness and originality. In this sense, Hildegard's spiritual drama, together with the Christian dramatic works of the Benedictine canoness Hrotsvith de Gandersheim (*ca.* 935-*ca.* 1002), inspired by those of the Latin comedian Terence, deserve to be crowned as one of the great medieval Latin dramas.[5]

The *Ordo Virtutum* can be defined as a dramatised *psychomachia*, in the etymological sense of the term, i.e., a Soul that, incarnated in this world, is torn between the temptations of the Devil and the path of salvation through the virtuous way. The *Ordo* describes the dangers (*Diabolus*) that meet her along this path that the Soul chooses, and the celestial forces (*Virtutes*) that, as her allies, will powerfully battle to bring the light of God into the heart of the protagonist.

Its characters, with the exception of the prophets and the patriarchs, who appear only in the prologue and epilogue of the play, are personifications: the Soul is, together with the virtues, the protagonist; the antagonist of the play, on the other hand, is the Devil, who, unable to sing (music in the drama is reserved only for beings of a divine and luminous nature), faces and confronts the seventeen Virtues, who, like a heavenly host, belligerently help the Soul to overcome evil at all times.[6]

This allegorical spiritual *psychomachia* can be related to monastic life and particularly to the integration of the oblates into the new religious community: through the performance and singing of this work, the author might have intended to make them aware of the fullness, peace, purity

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musical transcription in order to adapt it to different circumstances, and therefore, in this sense, it is not very faithful to the original score of the Riesencodex (A. E. Davidson 1984: 495-496 i 1992: 1-2).

[4] For an excellent description and contextualisation of the *Ordo Virtutum*, see Maura Böckeler (1923) and Otto Ursprung (1958-1961). Regarding the content and description of the *Ordo*, see also the following: Peter Dronke (1970, 1970b, 1981, ²1986), Bernward Konermann (1991), Gunilla Iversen (1992) and Eckerhard Simon (2011)..

[5] Otto Ursprung (1958-1961: 943) gives the *Ordo* a place of honour in the history of German literature and particularly in the history of medieval Latin dramas, together with the work of her Benedictine sister, the nun playwright Hrotsvith of Gandersheim: «Das dramatische Spiel *Ordo Virtutum* aber verleiht ihr den Anspruch, in der Geschichte der deutschen Literatur und insbesonders des lateinsichen Dramas des Mittelalters einen Ehrenplatz neben ihrer Ordensschwester, der Nonne Hrotsvith von Gandersheim (geb. um 935, Todesjahr einer alten Überlieferung zufolge 1002), einzunehmen».

[6] Besides the individual performances of each soloist, three choirs also take part, a heavenly one, formed by the seventeen Virtues and appearing in all the scenes, and two earthly ones, more secondary: the choir of prophets and patriarchs in the prologue, and the retinue of incarnated souls, who only appear in the first scene.

and beauty derived from a virtuous life, lived in community and consecrated to God. Thus, Hildegard's chant and music become fundamental elements of the *Ordo*, almost like catalysts, as they become a purifying and cathartic medicine for the soul.[7]

Fortunately, tradition and the passage of time have preserved in its entirety this sung allegorical drama, of which the original neumatic notation, contemporary to Hildegard herself, has been preserved.[8] Two manuscripts preserving the *Ordo Virtutum* with neumatic notation have survived: the most important, the so-called Riesencodex from Wiesbaden (ms. R, Hessische Landesbibliothek 2 "Riesencodex", fol. 478va-481vb) and a later manuscript preserved in the British Library in London (ms. A, Add. Ms 15102, fol. 207r-221r), dated 1487 and copied by Johannes Trithemius, abbot of Sponheim.

In addition to these two precious sources, the text of the *Ordo Virtutum* is also preserved, with some variations, without neumatic notation and in a reduced version—the complete second scene, prologue and epilogue are missing—in the third book of the *Scivias*, 13th vision (R 133r-134r). This is, in my opinion,[9] a very important source, for it predates the *Ordo* with neumatic notation, and presents variations with respect to it that informs us of precious details.

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[7] Regarding the music and the theology of chant in the poetic compositions of Hildegard of Bingen and in relation to the *Ordo Virtutum*, see Ludwig BRONASKI (1922), M. Immaculata RITSCHER (1967, 1969, and 1979), Audrey E. DAVIDSON (1984 and 1992b), Agnes STEINMETZ (1991), Barbara STÜHLMEYER (2003, 2012), Georgina RABASSÓ (2013) and Eulàlia and Mariona VERNET (in press: §2.5).

[8] Unfortunately, we have no explicit historical evidence for the performance of the Ordo Virtutum. However, we do have epistolary evidence that reveals special and unusual liturgical practices that would have taken place within the Rupertsberg community of nuns: in a letter sent to Hildegard dated 1148-1150, the abbess Tengswich of Andernach writes (*Epist.*, LII, p. 126, 1. 12-20): «Aliud etiam quoddam insolitum de consuetudine uestra ad nos peruenit, uirgines uidelicet uestras festis diebus psallendo solutis crinibus in ecclesia stare, ipsasque pro ornamento candidis ac sericis uti uelaminibus pre longitudine superficiem terre tangentibus, coronas etiam auro contextas capitibus earum desuper impositas et his utraque parte et retro cruces insertas, in fronte autem agni figuram decenter impressam, insuper et digitos earundem aureis decorari anulis, cum primus pastor Ecclesie talibus in epistola sua contradicat» [«We have certainly received news of something unusual regarding your practice: that on feast days, your nuns stand in church with their hair unbound, while they sing the psalms; and that, as an ornament, they wear long white silk veils, so long, that they touch the surface of the floor; they are also said to wear crowns with filigree gold, in which are embedded crosses on both sides and behind, with the figure of the Lamb impressed on the forehead, and that they wear golden rings on their finger, and all this in spite of the express prohibition of the chief pastor of the church!»]. In addition to these highly eloquent historical reports, we find, in the manuscripts containing Hildegard's works, indirect indications of a dramatic representation of the Ordo, especially the didascalias of each character, which contain information referring to a staging. However, despite this information, the issue of the possible representation of the drama of the Virtues is a debate that continues to divide scholarly opinion. Thus, there are those who erroneously maintain that the play was never performed (Eckehard SIMON 1991: xiii), there are scholars who claim that the spiritual drama of the Virtues was in fact performed. Among the latter we find Peter DRONKE ([2]1986: 35-36), Paula SCHEINGORN (1992:43-62) and Gunilla IVERSEN (1992: 97).

[9] This is also the opinion of the majority of scholars, such as Maura BÖCKELER (1927: 34-35); Marianna SCHRADER and Adelgundis FÜHRKÖTTER (1956: 21); Otto URSPRUNG (1958-61: 944); Pudentiana BARTH, M. Immaculata RITSCHER and Joseph SCMIDT-GÖRG (1969: 165-205); the edition of the *Scivias* by Adelgundis FÜHRKÖTTER (1978: XIII, XXXI, LI-LII); Bernward KONERMANN (1991: 54); Gunilla IVERSEN (1992: 81). Surprisingly, Peter Dronke has been the only scholar to consider it the other way around: that is, that the *Ordo* with neumatic notation was the prototext of the reduced version of the *Ordo*, present in the thirteenth vision of the third book of the *Scivias*.

2. The versification of the *Ordo Virtutum* and biblical Hebrew poetry: common features

The *Ordo Virtutum* was written in free verse, featuring no end-rhyme schemes or other metrical devices. Gunilla Iversen (1992: 80) hinted at the idea, without going into much depth, that Hildegard, unlike her contemporaries, wrote in free verse in a manner similar to the versification of the biblical psalms.[10] However, there is as yet no published study that focuses solely on the verse and music of the *Ordo Virtutum*.

The poetry of the Psalms, as well as Canaanite and Semitic biblical poetry in general, is fundamentally characterised by the use of the free verse, in which the recourse to the *parallelismus membrorum* and the repetition of certain words play an important role.[11] This poetic technique was common to the East and West Semitic (Canaanite) languages of the third, second and first millennium BC, including the Ugaritic language (dating from 1600-1200 BC). There are strong parallels and similarities between Ugaritic and Hebrew literature, since they belong to the same tradition of versification and orality.[12]

Next, we will show the metrical and rhetorical characteristics of the free poetry of the *Ordo Virtutum* in comparison with biblical poetry, in order to highlight its influence through the Vulgate.

2.1. A non-quantitative metric

Biblical Hebrew poetry stands out for not having any kind of quantitative metre. There have been attempts to prove that there was a definite sequence of long and short syllables in the ancient Hebrew poems, but these hypotheses were made with change of punctuation, and introduced many metrical licences that further complicated the Canaanite versification system. Consequently, in the Old Testament passages with *dialectus poetica* or written in parallelism (ex. Gn 4,23 i ss), we find no sequence of short or long syllables.[13] In the case of the *Ordo Virtutum*, there does not

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[10] On medieval lyric poetry see Peter Dronke ³1996. On Hildegard's poetry see Peter Dronke (1970 and 1970b), Gunilla Iversen (1992 and 2001) and M. Immaculata Ritscher (1969 and 1979).

[11] On the topic of prosody and metre in biblical Hebrew poetry see H. Hurushowski (1972), Michael P. O'Connor (1980) and Luís Alonso Schökel (1963 and 1987). On medieval Hebrew lyric poetry see Josep M. Millàs Vallicrosa (1941 and 1953) and Hayyim Schirmann (1948); on the status of early European Romanesque poetry, see Ramon Menéndez Pidal (1960), among others.

[12] Some Ugaritic tablets, usually written in epic verse, show poetic texts with direct parallels to those of the Old Testament (see Gregorio del Olmo 1981). The Ugaritic poetic texts make up a total of four thousand verses, which date back to an earlier stage, from a very ancient oral tradition. Beyond the strictly Canaanite sphere, we find the same type of versification in Accadian poetry, the language of ancient Mesopotamia from the third and second millennia BC, the *Enûma Elish*, and the *Gilgamesh* being the greatest literary exponents. Many of the literary structures and devices used in Accadian poetry (parallelisms, chiasms, acrostics, etc.) also appear in Hebrew poetry. (see Johannes Cornelis de Moor and Wilfred G. E. Watson 1993).

[13] On quantitative metrics in medieval Hebrew poetry see Hayyim Schirmann (1948) and Josep M. Millàs Vallicrosa (1940, 1953 and ³1973).

seem to be a quantitative rhyme either. As we have pointed out, the verse is free and structured, and based on the principle of the *parallelismus membrorum*.

Accentual Rhythm

In Hebrew poetry, the rhythmic structure is what gives body to the melody of the verse and reinforces the structure of the parallelism. The most important rhythmic element is the accent. The number of accents in each verse is not necessarily fixed or permanent. However, the specific numerical relationship is important, because each verse is normally a phrase, a basic syntactic and logical unit that has two, three or four accented words. The laconic and condensed nature of biblical Hebrew contributes to the prominence of each word in the verse. The verses are static, independent units, well balanced against each other. This aspect is favoured by the nature of biblical syntax, which calls for parataxis as opposed to subordination of clauses and phrases. As a rule, two accents are not allowed next to each other, and long words have secondary accents.

In the *Ordo Virtutum*, we find numerous correspondences in this sense, since each verse is generally equivalent to an independent syntactic unit, a sentence in many cases, with a similar, if not identical, number of stressed words. Here is an example (vv. 48-53):

> *Virtutes ad Animam illam*
>
> O *Á*nima, uolunt*á*te D*é*i constit*ú*ta, /
> et o f*é*lix instrum*é*ntum, /
> qu*á*re tam fl*é*bilis es c*ó*ntra h*ó*c, /
> qu*ó*d D*é*us contr*í*uit in uirg*í*nea nat*ú*ra? /
> T*ú* d*é*bes in n*ó*bis super*á*re di*á*bolum. /

In this strophe, all the verses, with the exception of the second, show four accented words. Moreover, each verse is an independent syntactic unit, much like what we see in biblical poetry.

2.2. The *parallelismus membrorum* as a versification and strophic principle

The most important principle that dominates Hebrew poetry and its stichometric arrangement is parallelism. Normally, two verses (sometimes three or even four) are parallel to each other in one or more respects. Parallelism can be of different types: complete or partial; of a whole verse or of a part of it; of words in the same order or in a changed order; it can be a semantic, syntactic, prosodic, morphological or phonetic parallelism, or a combination of all these elements.

In the *Ordo Virtutum*, we can also note the constant use of this type of resource, which, as in the case of Hebrew poetry, becomes the most important resource to provide it with structure. Let us

look at some examples (we emphasise the elements that constitute the parallelism):

<table>
<tr><td>verses   28-29:</td><td>*O dulcis diuinitas*,
et *o suauis uita*[14]</td></tr>
<tr><td>verses 143-148:</td><td>Euge! Euge!
Quis est tantus timor?
Et *quis est tantus amor*?
Vbi est pugnator,
et *ubi est remunerator*?
Vos nescitis quid colitis.[15]</td></tr>
<tr><td>verses 171-172:</td><td>*O uiuens uita*
et *o suauis consolatrix*[16]</td></tr>
</table>

In biblical Hebrew poetry we find different rhetorical forms found in parallelisms, such as synonymic parallelism, antithetical parallelism and chiasmus (or inverse parallelism). All these devices are also found in the *Ordo Virtutum*.

2.3. Absence of end rhyme

Biblical verses are in principle exempt from end rhyme.[17] In the entire Hebrew Bible there is no poem with end rhyme. Rhyme was only popularised by the Arabs in later times: the *Qur'an* was the first major literary work to use rhyme on a regular basis. Similarly, the verses of the Ordo Virtutum show no trace of end-rhyme. Let us look at an example (verses 288-296):[18]

Penitens Anima ad Virtutes (verses 288-296)

Ego peccator qui fugi uitam:
plenus ulceribus ueniam ad uos,
ut prebeatis michi scutum redemptionis.
O tu omnis milicia regine,
et o uos, candida lilia ipsius, cum rosea purpura,
inclinate uos ad me,
quia peregrina a uobis exulaui,
et adiuuate me, ut in sanguine filii Dei possim surgere.[19]

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[14] "O sweet divinity, O gentle life".

[15] "Bravo! Bravo! What is this great fear,and this great love?Where is the champion?Where the prize-giver? You don't even know what you are worshipping!".

[16] "Living life, gentle, consoling one".

[17] In some cases, such as in Exodus 15:1-19, we find assonant rhyme at the end of verses, as in *anwehu* and *aromemenhu* (15:2), but this end rhyme *-hu* (= "to him"), must be regarded as a false rhyme, since Hebrew very often has nouns modified by suffixed pronouns.

[18] For this article, I follow the numbering of the verses and the proper stichometric layout that we have adopted for the new critical edition (M. and E. Vernet, in press). Therefore, the edition of the Latin text and the Catalan translation are ours.

[19] *Soul (penitently, to the Virtues)* (verses 288-296) // I am the sinner who fled from life: riddled with sores I'll come

In this strophe, which can serve as an example for the rest of the strophes of the Ordo, there is no hint of end rhyme, as is the case in Hebrew biblical poetry.

2.4. *Combinations of phonemes and alliterations*

Alliteration or repetition of sounds is a poetic device also present in biblical poetry. There are different types of alliteration. In simple alliteration, a string of sounds is repeated, as in the following case from Proverbs (11:8), in which the voiceless alveolar affricate consonant /tʃ/, written with the letter *tsadî <ṣ>*, appears several times: *ṣaddîq miṣṣārâ neḥᵉlâṣ* ("the righteous is saved from danger", ⁸צַדִּ֣יק מִצָּרָ֣ה נֶחֱלָ֑ץ).

In the *Ordo Virtutum* some passages also contain alliteration, as in the passage in which the *Diaboulus*, booing, says (verses 143-148):

> Euge! Euge!
> Quis est tantus timor?
> Et quis est tantus amor?
> Vbi est pugnator,
> et ubi est remunerator?
> Vos nescitis quid colitis.[20]

In this strophe, the continued use of words with the phonemes /t/ and /s/ creates in the listener a feeling of aggressiveness and violence. Moreover, the hissing sound is reminiscent of the serpent's whistle, the image of the Devil.

Alliteration can also be expressed by the repetition of the same root, syntactically justified, as in the case of Judges 14:12 (Hebrew *'aḥudá / ḥidá*):

> ¹²הֲדֵ֣יח סֵכֵ֣ל אֲגֵ־הֲדָ֣וּחָ֣א וְֽשׁמְשׁ מֹהֲ֥ל רְמָ֥אִיַּ
> And Samson said to them, Let me tell you a riddle.

In the *Ordo Virtutum* one can also find this rhetorical device:

(verse 60)	et *esto stabilis*, et numquam cades.[21]
(verses 171-173)	O *uivens uita*,
	et o suauis consolatrix,
	tu *mortifera mortis* vincis[22]

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to you – you can offer me redemption's shield. All of you, warriors of Queen Humility, her white lilies and her crimson roses, stoop to me, who exiled myself from you like a stranger,and help me, that in the blood of the Son of God I may arise.

[20] "Bravo! Bravo! What is this great fear,and this great love?Where is the champion?Where the prize-giver? You don't even know what you are worshipping!".

[21] "be steadfast, and you'll never fall".

[22] "Living life, gentle, consoling one,you overcome the deadly shafts of death".
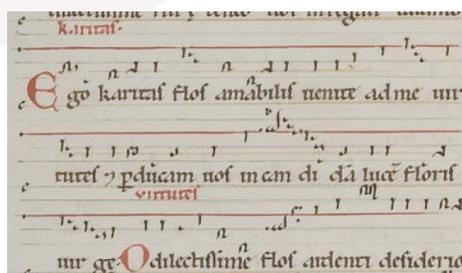
3. The biblical imagery of the text

As we have just seen, one of the characteristics of the *Ordo Virtutum* is that it presents a Latin text which, both in terms of language and images, is steeped in biblical influence, with resonances that evoke passages from both the Old and the New Testament. These biblical echoes are not only contextual and poetic, but also textual and linguistic, as we shall see below.

In this second section we will comment on some passages which evoke poetic images of some biblical passage. Let us look at some cases.

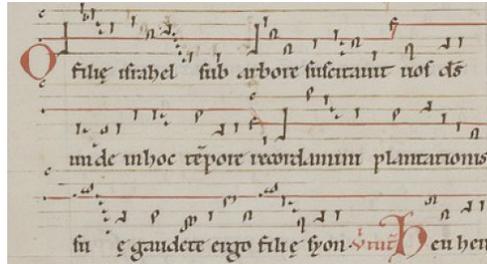#### 3.1. The Old Testament

The rod of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1)

(Fig. 1, R 479 va)

Caritas (verses 128-131)	Charity (verses 128-131):	Isaiah 11:1
Ego Caritas, ǀ flos amabilis: uenite ad me, Virtutes, et perducam uos in candidam lucem ǀ floris uirge.	I am Charity, the flower of love –come to me, Virtues, and I'll lead you into the radiant light of the flower of the rod.	Et egredietur virga de radice Jesse, et flos de radice ejus ascendet.

In the poetic image of verse 131 ("in candidam lucem floris virge") we glimpse a metaphorical appeal to the prophetic passage in Isaiah (11:1), which predicts: «And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root».

This well-known biblical passage is, from a theological and Christological point of view, very important: Christologically, it is interpreted as a reference to the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, the descendant of David. Therefore, Hildegard takes this biblical reference to make her wish to lead all the Virtues to the light of Jesus.

Sub arbore suscitavit uos, Deus (Ct 8:5)

(Fig. 2, R 480 va)

Humilitas (verses 256-259)	Humility (verses 256-259)	Song of Songs (8:5b)
O filie Israhel, sub arbore suscitauit uos Deus, _ unde in hoc tempore recordamini plantationis suae. Gaudete ergo, filie Syon!	Daughters of Israel, God raised you from beneath the tree, so now remember how it was planted. Therefore rejoice, daughters of Zion.	Vg: ⁵ < Sponsus > Sub arbore malo suscitavi te; ibi corrupta est mater tua, ibi violata est genitrix tua. BH: ⁵ תַּחַת הַתַּפּוּחַ עוֹרַרְתִּיךָ שָׁמָּה חִבְּלַתְךָ אִמֶּךָ שָׁמָּה חִבְּלָה יְלָדַתְךָ:

This antiphon, which is sung by the Humility at the end of the second scene (verses 256-259), is addressed to the Virtues, who are often called in the *Ordo Virtutum* "Daughters of Israel" or "Daughters of Zion", epithets that also appear in the Song of Songs (3:11), as well as the epithet "Daughters of Jerusalem" (Song of Songs 1:5).
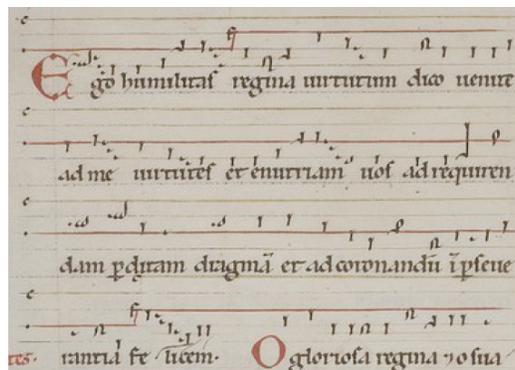
The sentence "sub arbore suscitavit uos, Deus" has an important biblical echo and force: it refers us, on the one hand, to the verse from the Song of Songs (8:5b), where the husband (God) reminds the wife (Soul): "Under the apple tree I raised thee up" (heb. תַּחַת הַתַּפּוּחַ עוֹרַרְתִּיךָ).[23] This passage evokes, in turn, Song of Songs (2:3), where the wife (Soul) makes a description of her husband (God), comparing him in beauty with an apple tree: "Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my beloved among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste".[24]

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[23] Song of Songs (8:5b): "Under the apple tree I raised thee up: there thy mother was corrupted, there she was defloured that bore thee".

[24] Latin text of the Vulgata [Song of Songs (2:3)]: "³Sicut malum inter ligna silvarum, sic dilectus meus inter filios. Sub umbra illius quem desideraveram sedi, et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi meo".

3.2. The New Testament

The parable of the lost drachma (Luke 15:8-10)[25]

(Fig. 3, R 479va)

Humilitas (verses 116-120)	Humility (verses 116-120)	Luke 15, 8-10 (Vulgata)
Ego, Humilitas, / regina Virtutum, dico: / uenite ad me, Virtutes, / et enutriam uos ad requirendam perditam dragmam / et ad coronandum in perseuerantia felicem. /	I, Humility, queen of the Virtues, say: Come to me, youVirtues, and I'll give you the skill to seek and find the drachma that is lost and to crown her who perseveres blissfully.	[8] Aut quae mulier habens drachmas decem, si perdiderit drachmam unam, nonne accendit lucernam, et everrit domum, et quaerit diligenter, donec inveniat? [9] Et cum invenerit convocat amicas et vicinas, dicens: Congratulamini mihi, quia inveni *drachmam quam perdideram*. [10] Ita, dico vobis, gaudium erit coram angelis Dei super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente.

This antiphon, which opens the second scene of the *Ordo* (verses 116-120) and which Humilitas addresses to her sisters, the rest of the Virtues, contains a clear biblical reference to the parable of the lost drachma, quoted in Luke's gospel, which recounts the joy felt by the protagonist when, after having patiently searched for the drachma (i.e. her soul) she had lost in the darkness of the night, she finds it again and, happy as she is, invites her friends to celebrate her discovery (Luke 15,8-10):

> [8]Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? [9]And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' [10]In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

In the *Ordo*, "her who perseveres blissfully" can also be identified with the Soul, for she equates herself with the protagonist of the parable, the lady who, after patiently searching all night for the lost drachma under the light of a lamp and, filled with joy, finds it, celebrates with her neighbouring friends.

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[25] All images are taken from the Riesencodex available on the website http://hlbrm.digitale-sammlungen.hebis.de/handschriften-hlbrm/content/pageview/450590

In this passage, then, the Virtues, who crown "her who perseveres blissfully", are equated with the angels of God, quoted in Luke's Gospel, who feel infinite joy over a single sinner who repents (Luke 15:10).[26]

Antiquus serpens ligatus est (Revelation 20:2)
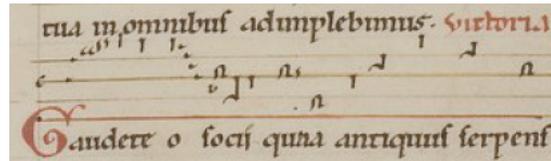
(Fig. 4, R 481rb)
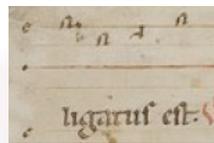
(Fig. 4bis, R 481va)

Victoria (verses 366-367)	Victory (verses 366-367)	Revelation 20:2
Gaudete, o socii, / quia antiquus serpens ligatus est! /	Comrades, rejoice: the age-old snake is bound!	²Et apprehendit draconem, serpentem antiquum, qui est diabolus, et Satanas, et ligavit eum per annos mille.

The Virtue of Victory, in the fourth scene, in one of the most joyous moments of the play (verses 366-367), sings a song of praise for having defeated and bounded the Devil. In the *Ordo*, the *Diabolus* is called "antiqui serpentis" (verse 95, verse 237, verse 282, verse 329), an adjective that is also used to refer to Satan in the book of Revelation. In this case, the parallelism is evident (Revelation 20:2): "He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years".

4. Conclusions

We have just examined certain passages in the *Ordo Virtutum* which are clearly biblical in content, form and language. We have thus observed how the Latin text of the Vulgate is often adapted to the Hildegardian text, in the form of a cento, to illustrate a particular antiphon, a particular character, or a parallel description.

Likewise, the use of different rhetorical devices more characteristic of the Hebrew language than of the classical Latin language—such as the presence of internal accusatives and etymological figures (e.g *vivens vita*, *mortifera mors*)—brings to the Latin text of the *Ordo* a special poetic

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[26] Luke (15:10): "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents".

and dramatic force so characteristic of the mystical texts, which makes the play particularly expressive and forceful for a drama.

The presence of these Hebraising tendencies in the Latin language of *Ordo Virtutum* is a subject that has not yet been studied in depth. These Semitic features, present in this medieval Latin which is basically classical and biblical, must be explained either by the influence on the language of the biblical Latin of Saint Jerome, or by an explicit lyrical intention of the author, which suggests that behind the Ordo there is an erudite hand, with knowledge of biblical language, syntax and poetry, and eager to capture them in her work.

Moreover, in the first part of the article, we have been able to verify that the free versification of the *Ordo Virtutum* presents, with the exception of the acrostic, the same stylistic resources as the Hebrew poetry of the Old Testament, and therefore, its influence on Hildegard's poetry should be seriously considered in future works.

The beauty of the poetic verse of the *Ordo Virtutum* lies precisely in the power that its words evoke, in the wealth of images that they arouse in the reader's or viewer's imagination, as well as in the simplicity of its language. A simplicity that Hildegard herself considered to be a spiritual virtue, so that humility—simplicity of heart—is also manifested in some way in the text, which purposely avoids the refluffing and syntactic complexity of the language, so that it reaches directly into the heart of the viewers.

Hildegard's poetry is moving when read, because of its strength and formal purity, like many of the texts of the Old and New Testaments. These principles are also reminiscent of the rules that governed the *lectio divina* or reading of the texts, an essential part of monastic life, in which the texts were read slowly and aloud, in order to provoke in the reader an image or idea that would motivate him on his spiritual journey. In this reading, nouns, determiners, adjectives, etc., are more important than the narrative thread itself. This way of reading the sacred texts may have influenced Hildegard's process of versification, in which words and images acquired a life of their own through the music that wrapped them.

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