
Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present

Anna M. Nogar

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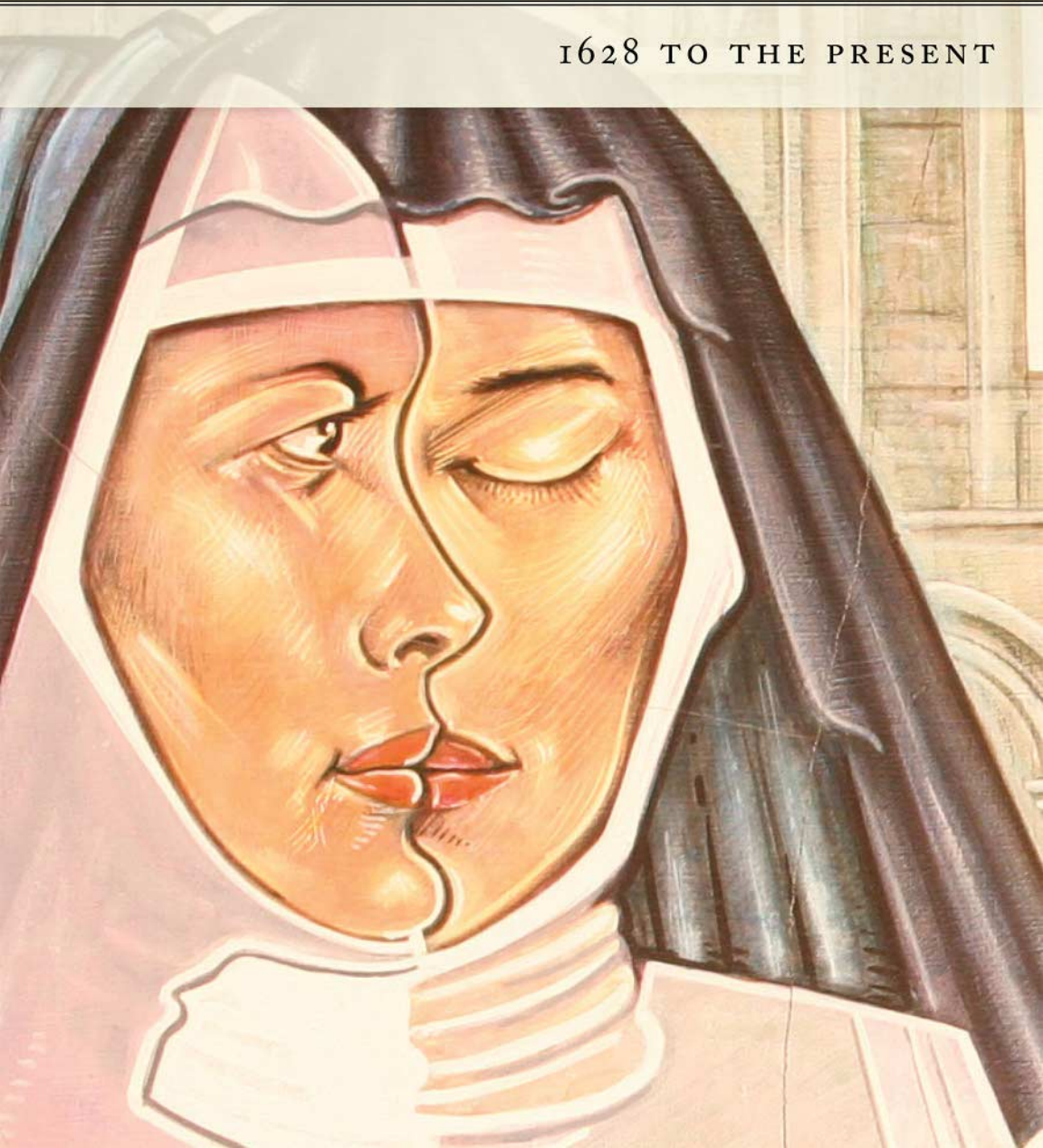
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ANNA M. NOGAR

Quill *and* Cross *in the* Borderlands

SOR MARÍA DE ÁGREDA AND THE LADY IN BLUE

1628 TO THE PRESENT



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For my family.

AMN

Las virtudes de los Siervos de Dios salen al público medrosas,
hasta que la perezosa volubilidad de los años va limpiando la idea
de ciertas materiales impresiones que le ofuscan el brillante lustre.

—Francisco Palóu, *La vida de Junípero Serra*

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Figure I.1. Creating *The Lady in Blue*, by puppet troupe Puppet's Revenge. Image courtesy Ron Dans.

INTRODUCTION

A Literary Protomissionary in the Borderlands

De mi persona, siempre he tenido grande escrúpulo,
porque yo sé quien soy.

I have always been scrupulous regarding my person,
for I know who I am.

—Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda¹

Colonial-era Spanish accounts tell the story of the Lady in Blue. According to these *historias*, in roughly 1628 a woman dressed in blue or gray religious garb appeared to the Jumano tribe of eastern New Mexico. She instructed the tribe in Catholic beliefs and exhorted them to seek out the Franciscan friars stationed nearby, whom the Jumano had yet to encounter. When the friars and the Jumano did eventually meet, the friars found that the tribe displayed signs of catechesis: its members processed with crosses decorated with flowers, and many made the sign of the cross before the friars had taught them how to do so. The mission's Franciscan administrator in New Mexico, Fray Alonso de Benavides, reported to the Spanish Crown of this “milagrosa conversión de la nación Xumana” (miraculous conversion of the Jumano nation).² While attending the court of Felipe IV in Spain in 1630, Fray Benavides heard

of a cloistered nun rumored to have traveled spiritually to the Americas. He visited María Fernández Coronel y Arana in her convent in Ágreda, and determined, as others had, that she was the woman who had appeared to the Jumano tribe. Word of this woman, later known as Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda, and the mystical evangelization of the Jumano immediately spread in Spain and its colonies, and persists to the present day.

For many scholars, the account of the “Lady in Blue” is a quaint historical footnote, a throwback to a time when such miracle accounts were commonplace and belief in them motivated any number of behaviors. Historical and literary studies of the American Southwest and Mexico have afforded the Lady in Blue narrative the occasional dismissive chuckle,³ but the fantastical nature of her story has impeded sustained scholarly cultural and historical inquiry.⁴ A different type of analysis, one of a more hagiographic nature, views the narrative as a straightforward historical event but often divorces or abstracts it from its complicated historical context.⁵ What has not been recognized in either case—and what this book explicitly articulates—is that the narrative was intimately intertwined with popular readings of Sor María’s *writing* in colonial Mexico. From the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, the mystical evangelization narrative and Sor María’s spiritual writing were understood as two faces of a single coin by Spanish and New Spanish subjects alike.

In this vein, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands: Sor María de Ágreda and the Lady in Blue, 1628 to the Present* charts the nearly 400-year-long history of the Lady in Blue narrative, examining its trajectory from 1628 to today, and explains how and in what forms it endured and evolved. In these chapters I show that the account of Sor María’s apparition to the native tribes of the Southwest was an article of practical belief for Mexican citizens during the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Sor María the mystical evangelist functioned as a protomissionary model: her conversions were a touchstone and reference for religious and secular explorers, and the account became a fundamental episode in the history of the region. But the prominence of the Lady in Blue narrative in New Spanish colonization does not fully account for Sor María’s ubiquity. In this book, I argue that the survival and propagation of Sor María’s mission narrative hinged on the persistent popularity and wide distribution of her writing.

Contrary to how she has been typically understood in the context of colonial Mexico, I posit that Sor María was known in New Spain primarily as an author of spiritual texts. The nun's most famous work, the Marian treatise *La mística ciudad de dios* (*The Mystical City of God*),⁶ was vigorously endorsed in Spain by Spanish Franciscans and members of the Spanish monarchy, and this promotion extended to Mexico, where it developed a significant devotional following. Though studies of early modern women writers often consist of close readings of author biographies and writing, I here focus instead on the reading and interpretation of Sor María's writing by others.⁷ This analysis is uniquely possible in her case because her oeuvre was extensively printed, circulated, and cited in colonial Mexico for more than a century. Knowledge of Sor María's writing was commonplace: her community of reading was broad, and hers were among the most read texts in New Spain. Despite Sor María's prominence as a writer during the colonial period, she has been largely forgotten as such, with the result that the writerly Sor María has almost vanished from contemporary view.

Past scholarship has tended to frame the Lady in Blue narrative as a regional legend of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.⁸ This characterization is in some ways quite logical, as the events described occurred in New Mexico and Texas, and Lady in Blue lore still exists there, as this book discusses. Preserved and perpetuated primarily among the Indo-Hispano residents of the Southwest, the Lady in Blue legend is in this sense similar to other long-running regional folk narratives, such as those of La Llorona, Juan Soldado, and the appearance of the devil at casinos and *bailes*, and also other accounts that have been passed down over generations.⁹

As legend, the Lady in Blue shares qualities with other miracle narratives retold and preserved in the Southwest. With the Lady in Blue, written and oral histories of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Santiago, and the Santo Niño de Atocha (to name but a few) make up the repertoire of the borderlands miraculous: vernacular religious traditions commingled with secular beliefs and practices.¹⁰ The Lady in Blue is unquestionably a persistent manifestation of miracle discourse born out of the region, written into its historical landscape.

However, when considered solely within the borderlands legend/miracle tale paradigm, the Lady in Blue narrative's true historical scope is constrained. *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands* shows that the narrative traveled far beyond what we now consider the borderlands; it was

well known throughout Mexico and other Spanish colonies from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Moreover, reading the Lady in Blue solely as a miracle tale can obscure how it functioned as a model for colonial-era missionaries, conditioning their behaviors and attitudes in the mission field. Furthermore, the narrow view of the narrative as borderlands miracle separates the Lady in Blue from Sor María's writing, when they were in fact closely linked in colonial-era Mexican cultural praxis.

Lastly, when taken as a borderlands miracle story, the narrative's origins are typically attributed to native informants, and the seventeenth-century reports by Fray Benavides are cited as the source for this assertion.¹¹ Yet postcolonial scholarship informs our understanding of accounts like Fray Benavides's, and advises great care in their reading. These studies make explicit the fact that gradients of power and representation gave voice to colonizing entities, while simultaneously appropriating or silencing those of the native populations who were subjected to extreme violence and displacement.¹² The histories told by those who were conquered seldom emerge explicitly in official historical documents, and they often require deep listening and recuperative efforts to reveal. When divulged, they show that history and narrative do not join so seamlessly.¹³

Keeping all this in mind, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands* is guided by scholarship on extraordinary narratives in historical sources, cultural practice, and oral tradition, which suggests that such accounts should be read beyond the parameters of the stories themselves to understand their contexts and retellings.¹⁴ Applied in concert with Mexican American cultural studies methodologies, and research into women's writing in colonial Latin America, this book achieves its objective of probing both the narrative and the writing that anchored it in colonial Mexico.¹⁵

This analysis was initially based on a fundamental juxtaposition: the account of the Lady in Blue features prominently in Sor María's holy biography, or *vita*, a text that prefaced *La mística ciudad de dios*.¹⁶ I show that this had major implications for how and where the narrative was read, for as celebrated seventeenth-century Mexican intellectual Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz observed of Sor María's writing, "corren sus escritos"—her works circulated broadly in New Spain.¹⁷ The robust distribution of *La mística ciudad de dios* throughout Mexico ensured that wherever Sor María's Marian text was found, so was the story of the Lady in Blue. As *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands* proves, this and

other written forms of the narrative provided a textual basis for the lore about the Lady in Blue that emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, contesting the notion that the legend's survival was solely the result of collective remembrance.¹⁸ Yet the singular importance of Sor María's writing in New Spain has not emerged in earlier studies of the Lady in Blue, or of the nun herself. This book seeks to remedy this omission.

We know from scholarship on writing by colonial Latin American women that the elision of Sor María as a writer is far from unusual. As Josefina Muriel commented in 1982, scholarly awareness of women's role in the culture of colonial New Spain has traditionally been one of "[una] ignorancia . . . completa" (a complete . . . ignorance), which she and other scholars have since corrected, revealing "esa parte integrante de la cultura mexicana formada por las mujeres que de manera activa participaron en ella, desde 1521 hasta 1821" (that integral part of Mexican culture formed by women who actively participated in its creation from 1521 to 1821).¹⁹ Debra Castillo quantifies the notable absence of attention to women's writing in traditional literary studies, citing a figure by María Elena and Mario Valdéz that 93.7 percent of the page total of literary histories through 1975 were dedicated to male writers. Invoking Sylvia Molloy's perspective on women writers, Castillo further comments on an "originary instability in describing the woman writer, where the two words put into juxtaposition vibrate on the page as a scandalous oxymoron."²⁰ Many studies since Muriel's 1946 *Conventos de monjas en la Nueva España* have rediscovered, documented, and problematized the role of women writers in the *colonia*. Asunción Lavrin addresses this in her work by articulating the role of women conventual writers, naming those scholars whose studies have "begun to fill gaps in these women's histories."²¹ And historian Lavrin further notes that "the lion's share in the writings on nuns has been done by literary critics,"²² citing Georgina Sabat de Rivers, Electa Arenal, Stacey Schlau, Kristine Ibsen, Kathleen Myers, Amanda Powell, Elisa Sampson Vera Tudela, Kathleen Ross, Jennifer Eich, and others who have contributed to this body of critical literature on colonial-era writing by women.²³

Though Sor María was Spanish rather than New Spanish, her shaping of public discourse in colonial Mexico makes her one of its notable literary figures. Sor María participated, as did many like her, in New Spain's cultural milieu: "Women who played an active role in the literary culture of the viceroyalty [of New Spain] were assiduous transmitters of the cultural values that constituted their world, values that

were so deeply rooted that they have survived to this day.”²⁴ Sor María’s authority seems to have been definitive, for Muriel observes that “the person who wielded the greatest mystical influence [in New Spain], along with St. Teresa, was the venerable María de Jesús de Ágreda . . . her influence on Spanish American Women writers was decisive, even on its greatest figures, such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in Mexico and Sor Francisca del Castillo in Colombia.”²⁵ Muriel saw in Sor María a writer whose impact on New Spanish culture has for too long remained unexamined.

To address these gaps in scholarship on Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda in New Spain, *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands* pursues two complementary lines of inquiry. The first examines the miracle narrative proper over almost four centuries of its existence. In the chapters dedicated to the narrative, I delineate its textual origins, role in colonial Mexico, folkloric manifestations, and contemporary interpretations. Two chapters examine the colonial period, and two focus on relatively recent cultural production, from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

The second line of inquiry maps out the promotion, distribution, and reading of Sor María’s writing in Spain and Mexico during the colonial period. The two sites are closely linked, as efforts to see the nun canonized extended directly from Spain to Mexico. Using archival materials, I establish that the beatification impetus resulted in a New Spanish distribution network for her texts that, in turn, helped establish a community of readers for her writing in Mexico. The dozens of printings of her writing made in New Spain substantiate my claim that Sor María gained traction as a spiritual author both separate from and in relationship to the Lady in Blue narrative. *Quill and Cross in the Borderlands* uncovers a woman writer of significant authority in New Spain who has all but disappeared from colonial literary history.

In chapter 1, I map the seventeenth-century textual origins of the Lady in Blue narrative through a close reading of several printed and archival sources. The chapter studies who the early authors of the narrative were, what each variation added or omitted, and who the colonial-era audiences for each version were. The analysis of these accounts together illustrates how the narrative developed under Spanish and New Spanish pens. As these early renderings were the sources for seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century understandings of the narrative in New Spain, they also establish a genealogy for its evolution in text, and respond to questions of the Lady in Blue narrative’s provenance.

Chapter 2 explores Sor María's biography, writing, and cultural importance as a religious author in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spain, setting the stage for her popularization in New Spain. Spanish Franciscans determinedly advanced her *causa* after her death, taking the remarkable step of establishing a printing press in its name. In this chapter, I create a bibliographic history for the Imprenta de la Causa de la Venerable Madre María de Jesús de Ágreda, which published numerous editions of *La mística ciudad de dios* and Sor María's biography, along with other religious works that earned money towards Sor María's canonization efforts. The chapter shows that the nun's lifelong relationship with Spanish monarch Felipe IV had direct ramifications for the Spanish Crown's advocacy of her case for canonization and endorsement of her writing, energies that extended to New Spanish shores.

Chapter 3 rediscovers Sor María as a spiritual author and religious figure in colonial Mexico. By considering how her diverse community of reading was established and cultivated, I show that the arrival of her writing to Mexico from Spain advanced Sor María's renown as a religious writer in New Spain. This idea gained autochthonous traction through Mexican presses, which published her writing regularly for more than a century, and created accessibility to her ideas for both literate and nonlettered New Spanish citizens. The chapter defines how the texts' circulation resulted in scholarly, religious, and artistic interpretations of their contents, and also fed a devotional community whose investment in Sor María's canonization emerges through religious practices and pious donations.

Chapter 4 returns to the Lady in Blue narrative proper in New Spain, reading it as a historical artifact. I analyze where the narrative was invoked on the northern mission frontier in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries, and consider who its principal transmitters were. The recovery of Sor María's writing reveals that by the late seventeenth century, the Lady in Blue narrative was cited from both written materials and collective memory. The chapter shows that her writing, found in far-flung religious libraries and personal collections, (fore)shadowed the movement of the narrative through the northern New Spanish borderlands, accompanying the Franciscan mission friars of Propaganda Fide and the Jesuits in Baja California and Sonora. This chapter outlines how the narrative of evangelization and colonization became an essential episode in the exploration and colonization of present-day New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and the Californias.

History transitions into legend in chapter 5's study of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American Southwest lore about the Lady in Blue. In its "folkloric" manifestation, the bilocation narrative overshadows Sor María's historical significance as a spiritual writer. I demonstrate how for many early twentieth-century Mexican Americans—some of the primary producers of Lady in Blue folklore—the narrative affirmed group identity and regional primacy in a time of racial oppression. The chapter illustrates how their accounts, and those by other storytellers and folklore collectors, are sites where work was done on the narrative, as the Lady in Blue is ascribed new miraculous abilities and social roles.

The final chapter, chapter 6, delves into the substantial contemporary production that centers on the Lady in Blue. I argue that most recent renderings are dissociated from Sor María's biography and from the history of her writing in Mexico; thus detached, the narrative becomes malleable and is readily reinterpreted. The chapter presents a variety of creative genres—including artwork, children's literature, dance opera, puppetry (see fig. 1.1), public commemoration, and fiction—that reiterate, reconstruct, or reimagine the Lady in Blue, and I pay particular attention to the narrative as a memory-artifact in Mexican American cultural production. In consuming these contemporary portrayals, readers are asked to understand a decontextualized story located within parameters crafted for it by the creators of these works. These conditions sometimes result in challenging renderings of the Lady in Blue and typically (but not always) erase Sor María as a writer.

Early twentieth-century Texan folklorist J. Frank Dobie considered the Lady in Blue an example of "sacerdotal humbuggery,"²⁶ despite the account's historical background and remarkable longevity. Ethnographer Enrique Lamadrid more fittingly identifies the Lady in Blue as one of New Mexico's "foundational milagro narratives,"²⁷ a legend rooted in and emerging from the region's early colonial history.²⁸ The seventeenth-century mystical narrative linked to Sor María's writing became the story of record for the nun in New Spain, and in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it has evolved into a site for negotiations of identity, coloniality, history, and spirituality. This book documents the material legacy of a legend that has survived and thrived for hundreds of years, and seeks to rediscover the writing that was that narrative's herald and counterpart.

CHAPTER ONE

Seventeenth-Century Spiritual Travel to New Mexico

A Miracle Narrative in Text

Antes de hacerse famosa la monja de Ágreda por sus escritos, por sus cartas, por su correspondencia regia y por la *Mística Ciudad de Dios*, su nombre ya sonaba asociado a las proezas de su misión catequizadora en Nuevo México.

Before the nun from Ágreda became famous for her writings, for her letters, for her royal correspondence, and for *The Mystical City of God*, her name was already associated with her catechizing mission feats in New Mexico.

—Ricardo Fernández Gracia¹

The account of the Lady in Blue, in which Sor María de Jesús de Ágreda traveled to the tribes of eastern New Mexico and western Texas and converted them to Catholicism in advance of Franciscan missionaries, continues to be retold even today, but the earliest, colonial-era versions of the narrative provide the basis for understanding it as it was popularized during the colonial period and later. This chapter examines the Lady in Blue narrative through the primary texts that recounted it in the seventeenth century. These texts were chosen because they are foundational

sources from which later interpretations of the narrative were drawn. All the works mentioned in this chapter were written by Spanish and New Spanish authors, and several were composed by the same author. These five versions of the Lady in Blue narrative contributed to how Sor María was understood in her time and after, and how she is understood today as a bilocating protomissionary: (1) Benavides's *1630 Memorial*; (2) Zárate Salmerón's *Relaciones*; (3) Sor María's and Benavides's letter to friars in New Mexico; (4) Benavides's *1634 Memorial*; (5) Ximénez Samaniego's *vita* of Sor María.

Franciscan friar Alonso de Benavides's *1630 Memorial* is the first of these texts. Although not the first New Spanish work that treats the Lady in Blue narrative, it is the earliest one that presents the account in detail, and it has therefore been read by many as the primary source for the narrative. The second text, the *Relaciones* by Franciscan missionary Fray Gerónimo Zárate Salmerón, predates the *1630 Memorial*, but the work has seldom been read in the context of Sor María's travels to that region. In Zárate Salmerón's text, the brief mention of the Lady in Blue narrative shows awareness within the Church in New Spain of Sor María as a mystical traveler to New Mexico prior to the publication of Benavides's *1630 Memorial*.

By 1631, Benavides had traveled to Spain to present the *1630 Memorial*; there he met Sor María in her convent in Ágreda. With Sor María adhering to her vows of obedience, she and the friar wrote a letter to the friars in New Mexico in which Sor María confirmed her visits to that mission field and asserted the important role of the Franciscan Order there. This letter is the third text. Benavides remained in Europe after meeting Sor María and composed a report for Pope Urban VIII, which derived from his earlier report, but significantly altered the Lady in Blue narrative. This fourth text, therefore, is Benavides's *1634 Memorial*.

The fifth and final version of the narrative examined in this chapter was published around 1670 (after Sor María's death in 1665) as part of her *vita*, or holy biography.² Written by Fray Joseph Ximénez Samaniego, who later became the minister general of the Franciscan Order, the *vita* not only explained Sor María's mystical travel in the context of the nun's examination by the Spanish Inquisition, but it also prefaced most editions of her exceedingly popular book, *La mística ciudad de dios*.

Each of the texts discussed here influenced ideas about Sor María as a mystical missionary in the Americas, a concept that continued to

evolve from the seventeenth century onward. This book intends to show that the so-called legend of the Lady in Blue was actually an historical artifact whose colonial-era dissemination and long-term survival were related to, if not dependent on, the success of Sor María's writing in colonial Mexico. As such, thinking about the audiences for each of these versions of the narrative is important. At the end of this chapter I consider who might have read each version, and to what extent they individually shaped shared ideas of Sor María's travel during the colonial period. We know the written form contributed to the narrative's longevity, internal stability, and consistency across centuries, but which versions were the most influential? The answers to this and like questions, presented in these pages, serve as a foundation for the chapters that follow.

"LA MUJER QUE LES PREDICABA" IN FRAY ALONSO DE BENAVIDES'S
1630 *MEMORIAL*

Many scholars cite the detailed rendering of the Lady in Blue narrative in Fray Alonso de Benavides's 1630 *Memorial* as the narrative's original New Spanish source. Published in Madrid in 1631, the 1630 *Memorial* is a report on the spiritual and material condition of the *custodia* of New Mexico written by its *custos*, or chief religious administrator, Fray Benavides. The document was presented by Benavides at the court of Felipe IV, when the friar had returned to Spain in 1630 to report on behalf of the Franciscan missionaries in New Mexico. The prominently placed section recounting the Lady in Blue narrative is entitled "Conversión Milagrosa de la Nación Xuamana," and it is one of several miracle accounts woven throughout the 1630 *Memorial*.³ The version of the Lady in Blue in the 1630 *Memorial* sets out many of the narrative's basic elements, but it leaves the woman who preached to the Jumanos Indians unnamed. Benavides refers to the female protomissionary as "la santa" (the saint) or "la mujer que les predicaba" (the woman who preached to them). Benavides would modify this and other elements of the narrative in his later writing on the subject.

In his introduction to the 1630 *Memorial*, Fray Juan de Santander, then the commissary general of the Indies, states the reader will find within it "descubrimientos de riquezas, así espirituales, como temporales" (the discovery of spiritual as well as temporal riches).⁴ This

intersection of religious and secular issues in New Mexico presented in the 1630 *Memorial* no doubt was of interest to its principally European readers.⁵ The reports on the arability of the land and the abundant natural resources to be found there, and of the possibility of silver mining (already an important source of income to the Crown in northern Mexico), would have appealed to the Spanish court and to potential investors in New Mexico.⁶

But Benavides had other motives apart from making New Mexico seem like a worthwhile investment. Historical documents contemporaneous to the 1630 *Memorial* indicate that one of Benavides's goals was the elevation of the New Mexico *custodia* to a *provincia* (a larger area of religious jurisdiction), and his own appointment as bishop to administer the new *provincia*.⁷ To this end, Benavides demonstrates a need for greater administrative autonomy to attend to the numerous new converts in the region.⁸ The 1630 *Memorial*'s representation of spiritual riches is important: from the successes of the friars among the New Mexican and Texan tribes⁹ to the primacy of the Franciscan Order in that mission field,¹⁰ these miraculous incidents serve as further proof of the Franciscans' vital role there and of the need for a province to be established.¹¹

Benavides privileges the Lady in Blue narrative amidst these objectives.¹² According to Benavides, what he wrote was based on reports made to him by the mission friars who had contact with the Jumanos. The "Conversión Milagrosa de la Nación Xumana" narrates the incident. Fray Juan de Salas met and was befriended by members of the Jumano tribe during his time stationed in the region.¹³ Over the course of six years, the Jumanos repeatedly requested that Salas be sent to them, a petition Benavides granted in 1629.¹⁴ But before Salas and Fray Diego López left to join the Jumanos, the tribe's emissaries were asked why they persisted in requesting friars who would come to the tribe and baptize them. They replied that a woman who resembled a picture of the Spanish nun Madre Luisa de Carrión, which was at the mission, preached to them in their own languages and urged them to seek out the friars.¹⁵ Other tribes that Benavides does not name made similar petitions with similar rationales.

According to Benavides, shortly before the friars and their guides arrived to the Jumano encampment, the devil became upset that he would soon lose the tribe's souls to the friars.¹⁶ He dried up the local

water, causing the buffalo they hunted to migrate away, and relayed through the tribe's "hechizeros" (spiritual leaders) that the friars were never going to arrive and the tribe should leave and find another site.¹⁷ As the tribe readied to move, "la Santa," the woman who had visited the Jumanos, told the tribe's captains to remain where they were because the friars would be there soon. Jumano scouts left to search for the friars. When they found them, Salas and López produced a picture of Madre Carrión, and the scouts confirmed that this woman was like the one who visited them, but that the woman they saw was younger and more beautiful.¹⁸

When the friars arrived to the tribe's encampment, the Jumanos greeted them with a procession led with two large crosses, a gesture Benavides suggests demonstrated that they were "bien industriados del cielo" (well taught in heavenly matters).¹⁹ Salas and López offered their personal crucifixes and a statue of the infant Jesus for veneration by the Jumanos, which the tribal members did "como si fueran Christianos muy antiguos" (as if they had been Christians for a long time).²⁰ The friars asked for those in the crowd of ten thousand who desired baptism to raise their hands; to the friars' reported surprise, everyone raised their hands, including infants lifted up by their mothers. Over the course of the next several days, other nearby tribes who had also been visited by the protomissionary woman asked that the friars visit them too. Benavides interjects that the Japies and Xabotas had also likely seen her. He notes that the friars reported that the tribes desired to convert and form permanent settlements (the Jumanos were seminomadic), but adds that there were not enough priests to leave the two there, so Salas and López made plans to return to the central missions in New Mexico.²¹

Before leaving, the friars instructed the Jumanos to pray daily before a cross they would leave with the tribe, and to have recourse to it. The tribe's "Capitán mayor" (leader) asked the friars to cure the sick among the tribe, and all through the afternoon, night, and following morning, the two friars healed the ill members of the tribe.²² With one friar on either side, they made a cross over each individual, recited the *Loquente Jesu*, the *Concede nos*, and the *Deus, qui ecclesiam tuam*.²³ Benavides summarizes the scale of this miraculous event: "fueron tantos los que alli milagrosamente sanaron, que no pudieron reducirse a numero" (so many were miraculously healed that they were impossible to count).²⁴ As a result of this, the tribal members' faith in the cross was confirmed to such an extent that they hung crosses in front

of their tents. Benavides closes the “Conversión Milagrosa de la Nación Xumana” by expressing jubilant thanks for the miracles the Franciscans witnessed and executed among the Jumanos, and seeing in them the order’s particularly blessed role in the mission field: “O bondad infinita! Bendigante los Angeles, que assi quieres honrar a esta sagrada Religion, y a sus hijos, confirmando por su mano, con tantos milagros tu divina palabra. . . . [Bien se infiere] de lo dicho los bienes espirituales tan copiosos, que nuestra seráfica Religión ha descubierto por todo el mundo” (O infinite goodness! May the Angels praise you, that you so wish to honor this holy order [the Franciscans] and its sons, confirming your divine Word through its hand. . . . [One may infer this honor] from what has already been said of the copious spiritual blessings that our Seraphic Order has uncovered throughout the world).²⁵ Both the Lady in Blue’s conversion of the Jumanos, and of other nearby tribes, and the friars’ healing of the sick are interpreted by Benavides as evidence of the Franciscan Order’s celestial favor in the New Mexico mission.

The version of the Lady in Blue in the 1630 *Memorial* is the earliest full version of the narrative and provides many of the details that present-day scholars and cultural producers (such as artists, composers, canonization activists; discussed in chapter 6) draw on. However, Benavides’s account was not the first instance when the narrative was invoked in the New Spanish mission context. The mysterious, unnamed “mujer que les predicaba” in his 1630 account appears to have been presaged by a report on New Mexico made a year or two earlier that names Sor María specifically as that mystical evangelizer.

“SANTA MADRE MARÍA DE JESÚS”: GERÓNIMO ZÁRATE SALMERÓN’S
RELACIONES

Fray Géronimo Zárate Salmerón was a Franciscan friar sent with a group of missionaries to New Mexico around 1618 or 1621. A linguist who lived at Jemez Pueblo, he wrote a *Doctrina* in the Jemez language. In 1626 he returned to Mexico City where he wrote *Relaciones de todas las cosas que en el Nuevo-Mexico se han visto y sabido, asi por mar como por tierra, desde el año de 1538 hasta el de 1626* [*An Account of All Seen and Known of New Mexico, By Sea and By Land, From 1538 to 1626*],²⁶ which was addressed to the commissary general of the Indies, Francisco

de Apodaca. The account is dated August 18, 1629; Zárate Salmerón likely wrote it between 1627 and 1629.²⁷ The *Relaciones* carried the approval of Fray Francisco de Velasco, the provincial of the Province of Santo Evangelio, to which the New Mexico *custodia* pertained.

In the *Relaciones*,²⁸ Zárate Salmerón summarizes the history of New Mexico “desde el año de 1538 hasta el de 1626”—from 1538 to 1626—recounting early exploration expeditions and documenting the establishment of missions. He begins with Francisco Coronado’s expedition, narrates the late sixteenth-century conquest and settlement of New Mexico by Juan de Oñate, and describes the real and fictional regions often then discussed in the context of New Mexico: Florida, the South Sea, and the Strait of Anián.

The Lady in Blue narrative appears in two of the last three paragraphs of the work, under the heading “Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús, abadesa del convento de Santa Clara de Agreda” (Account of the Holy Mother María de Jesús, abbess of the convent of Santa Clara de Ágreda).²⁹ In contrast to the text that precedes it, which flows easily from one historical episode to another, there is no transition or explanation for why the narrative is included, and the authorial voice is different from that of the earlier text.³⁰

The first paragraph briefly describes the region of New Mexico and puts forth the possibility that its inhabitants are in some way instructed in Catholic teachings:

Es muy probable que en la prosecución del descubrimiento del Nuevo-México, y conversión de aquellas almas, se dará presto en un reino que se llama Tidam . . . que según se entiende está entre el Nuevo-México y la Quivira, y si acaso se errare; la cosmografía ayudará el tomar noticia de otros reinos, llamados el uno de Chillescas, el otro de los Guismanes y el otro de los Aburcos, que confinan con este dicho reino de Tidam . . . se procurará saber si en ellos, particularmente en el Tidam, hay noticia de nuestra santa fe catolica y por qué medio y modos se la ha manifestado nuestro Señor.

It is very probable that in the continued discovery of New Mexico, and conversion of the souls there, one will come upon a kingdom called Tidam . . . which is understood to lie between New Mexico

and Quivira, and if one were to be mistaken, the cosmography will help one find other kingdoms, one called Chillescas, another of the Guismanes and another of the Aburcos, that border on the said kingdom of Tidam . . . one will seek to discover if in them, particularly in Tidam, there is news of our Holy Catholic Faith, and by what means and ways Our Lord has manifested it.³¹

Although this passage does not provide the detailed explanation that the 1630 *Memorial* does, or name Sor María, it does implicitly associate the nun with it through the title “Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús, abadesa del convento de Santa Clara de Agreda.” Zárate Salmerón’s version connects specific places (Tidam and Quivira) and specific tribes (Chillescas, Guismanes, and Aburcos) to Sor María and to the project of evangelization. The linkage among Sor María, New Mexico, and conversion in advance of missionaries is quite clear.

An injunction by the archbishop-elect of Mexico, Francisco Manso y Zúñiga, follows. In it, the archbishop orders that the claims of catechesis associated with Sor María be investigated by the friars sent to the New Mexico missions:

Nos, D. Francisco Manso y Zúñiga, electo arzobispo de México . . . encargamos mucho esta enquisición á los reverendos padres, y custodios de la dicha conversion para que la hagan y soliciten, con la puntualidad, fe y devoción que tal caso requiere, y para que de lo que resultare nos hayan dado aviso en manera que haga fe, de que sin duda procederán grandes aumentos espirituales y temporales en honor y gloria de Dios nuestro Señor.

We, Don Francisco Manso y Zúñiga, archbishop-elect of Mexico . . . entrust this inquiry to the reverend fathers and custodians of the aforementioned region, that they execute and seek it out with the punctuality, faith, and devotion that it requires, and so that of whatever may result, they will have faithfully advised us, and from which no doubt great spiritual and temporal gains for the honor and glory of the Lord our God will spring forth.³²

This order is cited in later accounts of the narrative, including others by Benavides. However, its inclusion in Zárate Salmerón’s document, pro-

duced in the 1620s, seems to acknowledge that in Mexico City in 1628, news of Sor María's travels was already beginning to circulate.³³ It indicates that the possibility of her travel was taken quite seriously within the Church leadership in New Spain as a part of the conversion project in its northern borderlands.

The archbishop-elect's conjecture about what the friars might encounter in New Mexico and the insinuation that their discoveries there would increase faith, and also produce spiritual and material well-being for Spain, are echoed in Zárate Salmerón's conclusion. This final paragraph of the *Relaciones* returns to the friar's voice, closing the work with an exhortation to the king and an appeal to Franciscan leadership, encouraging continued exploration of New Mexico and surrounding areas, for "lo cierto es, que en no acabar de explorar esta tierra, S.M. pierde una gran mundo" (what remains certain is that, by not completing the exploration of this land, Your Majesty loses a vast world).³⁴

The brief account of Sor María by Zárate Salmerón has not received much critical attention, likely because scholarship has tended to focus on the 1630 *Memorial*.³⁵ However, there are several reasons to carefully consider it and its relationship to the Benavides documents. First, by 1628, when Zárate Salmerón was completing the *Relaciones* in Mexico City, Manso y Zúñiga was archbishop-elect of Mexico; inclusion of his order to seek out Sor María of the "Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús" fits chronologically. It seems unlikely Zárate Salmerón would have heard of Sor María while in New Mexico, but he might have heard of Salas's story of the Jumanos from the other friars, as Benavides did—though he makes no mention of it. He more likely was informed of her once in Mexico City. Second, the account is bookended in the *Relaciones* by a conclusion written in Zárate Salmerón's voice, which makes it less likely that it was tacked on the end by a later writer or publisher, and no such modifications are noted in its 1856 publication.

News of Sor María's evangelization could have already traveled to Mexico City from Spain. In fact, according to Sor María's biographer³⁶ and to Benavides,³⁷ news of her mystical travels circulated within the Franciscan Order in the early 1620s. Sor María's *vita* and her Inquisition records state that she began to experience *exterioridades* (spiritual raptures) involving the conversion of native peoples as early as 1621 and continuing until 1628 or 1630. Sor María had presented these episodes to her confessor, who relayed them to Franciscan superiors in Spain.³⁸ It seems certain that such information arrived to Mexico by the late 1620s

and to the archbishop-elect, suggesting that the Lady in Blue narrative in Zárate Salmerón's *Relaciones* is authentic. This is particularly significant because it predates the *1630 Memorial*.

The chronology of Zárate Salmerón's *Relaciones* raises questions about what Benavides could have known about Sor María's travels when he wrote the *1630 Memorial*. This is difficult to satisfactorily answer, as are many questions about the narrative.³⁹ It is likely that Benavides was unaware of Archbishop-elect Manso y Zúñiga's letter at the time the events he recounts unfolded: Zárate Salmerón and Manso y Zúñiga were in Mexico City in 1628, while Benavides arrived in New Mexico in 1626 and did not return to Mexico City until 1630,⁴⁰ after the events narrated in the "Conversión Milagrosa de la Nación Xumana" took place in New Mexico. Nor is it likely he was informed about Sor María while in New Mexico: the *Relaciones* were not published at that time, and it is improbable that a manuscript copy would have arrived to Benavides while in New Mexico. However, as Benavides completed the *1630 Memorial* while in Mexico City, he may have been informed of Zárate Salmerón's "Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús," or of the source material from which it derived.⁴¹ In fact, Benavides would later say that he took a copy of Manso y Zúñiga's letter with him to Spain.

By the time Benavides wrote his *1634 Memorial*, he had modified his version of the Lady in Blue narrative considerably. Among other changes, he includes Zárate Salmerón's exact text of the "Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús" (with some stylistic modification) in his newer report on the "Conversión Milagrosa."⁴² Benavides states that in 1629, thirty friars sent from Mexico arrived to the mission in New Mexico already informed about Sor María's travel: "les encargo el Arco-bispo a los dichos religiosos la inquisicion deste caso dandoles la relacion que dos años antes auia lleuado de españa alas Indias" (the archbishop [of Mexico] entrusted the friars with the investigation of this case, providing them with the account that had arrived to the Indies two years earlier from Spain).⁴³ Benavides then reproduces the two paragraphs from the "Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús," though he attributes them neither to Zárate Salmerón nor to whatever source they might have shared.⁴⁴ What exactly Benavides knew before or while writing the *1630 Memorial* is unclear, but by the time he wrote the *1634 Memorial*, Benavides had read Zárate Salmerón's account, or his source material, locating the Lady in Blue narrative in Mexico before 1630.

REPORTING UNDER VOWS OF OBEDIENCE IN THE 1631 LETTER

When Benavides traveled to Spain in 1631 to present the *1630 Memorial* at the court of Felipe IV, Benavides tells that Fr. Bernardino Sena, the minister general of the Franciscan Order, had heard of Sor María's miraculous travels when he was the bishop of Burgos, eight years prior. Upon reading Benavides's report on the conversion of the Jumanos, and receiving Manso y Zúñiga's letter, Sena determined that Benavides and Sor María should meet. Sena sent Benavides to Ágreda to speak with the cloistered nun about the conversions in New Mexico, giving Benavides the authority "para obligar a la Bendita madre por obediencia que me manifestase todo Lo que sabia acerca del Nuevo Mexico" (to oblige the blessed mother under vows of obedience to declare to me all she knew about New Mexico).⁴⁵ The result of this compulsory meeting was a letter written by Sor María and Benavides to the friars in New Mexico in which Sor María's role as the Lady in Blue was confirmed and several specific details of the narrative—which would be reiterated again and again into the nineteenth century—were recorded.⁴⁶

The letter itself is a combination of two documents: a narration by Benavides and a "carta exhortatoria" (exhortative letter) from Sor María to the friars. Benavides's text encircles Sor María's letter and adds many details to the narrative. Sor María's letter repeats some of Benavides's text and encourages the missionaries in the field. Benavides's is the dominant voice, both as it is positioned and insofar as he is the authoritative figure. Sor María's portion, in contrast, begins "Obedesiendo"⁴⁷ (obeying) the orders of her male superiors to report to Benavides on her travels to New Mexico.⁴⁸ Sor María would twice later be forced by the Spanish Inquisition to explain the information she revealed to Benavides and to justify not only the nature of her travel but also what, if any, material evidence of her voyages remained behind in New Mexico.⁴⁹

The letter opens with Benavides stating that the Franciscan friars in New Mexico are favored by the angels and San Francisco, who intervene "personal, verdadera y realmente" (personally, truthfully, and actually) on the friar's behalf. Then, Benavides names Sor María as the mysterious female visitor to the Jumanos and New Mexico: "Lleban desde la villa de agreda . . . a la bendita y dichosa Madre de la orden de la Concepción franciscana descalza a que nos ayude con su presencia y predicación en

todas esas provincia y bárbaras naciones” (They [the angels and St. Francis] bring from the village of Ágreda . . . the holy and blessed Mother from the Franciscan Order of Discalced Conceptionists, so that she might help us with her presence and preaching in all those provinces and barbarous nations).⁵⁰ From the beginning of the letter, Sor María is linked to New Mexico and to the conversion of native peoples there. The narrative is positioned as a sign of the divine favor the order and the Crown receive in pursuing conversions there.

Benavides stresses his importance as an emissary from New Mexico, claiming that his 1630 *Memorial* was well received at court and alleging that no one previously knew anything of the New Mexico *custodia*: “no agradecia ni sabia lo que vuestras reverencias con apostolico zelo han trabajado en esa viña del Señor” (they neither knew nor gave thanks for all that Your Reverences have accomplished with apostolic zeal in that vineyard of the Lord).⁵¹ Benavides claims that his 1630 text is meant to remedy this ignorance and valorize the missions and friars. He says that four hundred copies of the 1630 *Memorial* were distributed in Spain, that a second printing of the text was being considered, and that copies had been sent to Rome.

In the letter, Benavides also describes his visit to Sor María’s convent in Ágreda, explaining that before telling the friars more about her visits to New Mexico, he wishes to first explain her family and upbringing, which he views as almost miraculous.⁵² He recounts the divine revelation that Sor María’s mother, Catalina Coronel, received to convert the family home into a convent, and for all the family members to enter religious life, which she and her husband, Francisco, did: “de su casa ysieron convento de monjas y ellas [Catalina, Sor María, and her sister Jerónima] quedasen en el. Y ellos [Francisco and Sor María’s two brothers] se metiesen frailes” (they made a convent of their home and the women [Catalina, Sor María, and her sister Jerónima] remained in the convent. And the men [Francisco and Sor María’s two brothers] became friars).⁵³ Benavides uses this remarkable family history to frame the discussion of Sor María herself as one that is marvelous. He rapidly transitions into a physical depiction of Sor María—“de hermoso rostro con ser mui blanco, aunque rosado ojos grandes y negros” (a handsome, pale and rosy face with large, black eyes)⁵⁴—that corroborates the rough description of the woman who appeared to the Jumanos: a woman like Madre Luisa de Carrión but “moça y Hermosa” (young and beautiful).⁵⁵ He

describes her Franciscan habit as “pardo” (gray-brown) with a white overdress, a scapular, and the cord of the Franciscan Order, which is topped by a cape of *sayal* (sackcloth) and black veil and worn with minimal footwear.⁵⁶ He states that during her mystical preaching in New Mexico and nearby regions, she would wear the Franciscan habit, though on other occasions she wore “el [hábito] de la Concepción,”⁵⁷ a blue habit. He also establishes the timeline for when her travel occurred, beginning in 1620 and continuing through 1631, sometimes occurring several times a day.

Benavides states that Sor María had wished for the conversion of faraway tribes “desde criatura” (since she was very young),⁵⁸ and she was brought to them accompanied by St. Michael and St. Francis;⁵⁹ once there, “personalmente a predicado por todas las naciones Nuestra Santa Fee católica Particularmente en Nuestro Nuevo Mexico” (she has personally preached our Holy Faith throughout all the [indigenous] nations, particularly in our New Mexico).⁶⁰ As if to confirm Sor María’s presence among the friars in New Mexico specifically, Benavides recounts anecdotes about the friars in the mission field and the tribes and regions that he maintains Sor María told him about: Benavides baptizing the Piro tribe, Father Quirós appearing, friars Salas and López among the Jumanos, and Fray Ortega’s miraculous escape.⁶¹ He adds that Sor María personally told the Jumanos and the Quivira tribe to seek out friars for baptism, echoing his 1630 *Memorial* account. Benavides asserts that she describes so many places and climates in New Mexico that “ni aun yo me acordava y ella las truxo a la memoria” (I myself could not recall [them], and she reminded me).⁶² Benavides then answers a question that he anticipates the friars would have upon reading the surprisingly intimate information about their fellow New Mexican friars and mission site: Since the native people could see Sor María, why was she invisible to the friars? The answer Sor María provides, according to Benavides, is succinct: the friars did not need to see her to affirm their faith, whereas the tribes did.⁶³

Benavides goes on to cite Sor María’s recommendations regarding the conversion of tribes to the far west of Quivira, thought to be in the general region of New Mexico-Texas. This section of the letter is one of the most frequently cited sections from the late seventeenth century into the nineteenth century: “en el discurso del camino se convertiran muchas gentes si Los soldados fueren de buen exemplo y que Nro Padre San

Francisco alcanzó de Nuestro Señor que con solo ver Los Indios a nrs. Frailes se convertirán” (on discussing the road [to the west of Quivira] many nations will be converted if the soldiers are of good comportment; Our Father San Francisco attained a pledge from the Lord that the Indians will convert [to Catholicism] solely upon seeing our friars).⁶⁴ This detail is repeated in eighteenth-century Mexican printings of the letter, as I shall discuss in chapter 3, and in chapter 4 I will show how the idea of the need for “soldados de buen ejemplo” in and near the missions was repeated by Franciscan mission friars, as was the notion that indigenous tribes would be converted to Christianity upon laying eyes on Franciscan friars.

Benavides lists the tribes and areas that Sor María visited in New Mexico: “los Rnos. de chillescas, canbujos y jumanos y luego el Reino de Ticlas” (the kingdoms of Chillescas, Canbujos, Jumanos, and then the kingdom of Ticlas), tribes similar (although Benavides does not note it) to those listed in the Zárate Salermón account (Chillescas, Guismanes, Aburcos, and Tidam). Benavides explains this list by acknowledging that these are not the tribes’ proper names, but rather ones that sound like them. Recounting what he says was told to him by Sor María, he reports that she left many items behind on her travels, including a monstrance, rosaries, and crosses. This important detail was later cited both by the Inquisition and by missionaries in northern New Spain, as was the curious account Fray Benavides includes concerning two friars who were martyred by a tribe, whose king they had converted and whose (the friars’) bones were kept by that king in a silver box.⁶⁵ Fray Benavides adds that Sor María was martyred while in the mission field.

Before including the nun’s response to his preceding account, Fray Benavides reminds his readers of the vows of obedience she followed in replying:

después de escritas que me quise despedir de ella se la mostre para que me dixese si en algo me abia equibocado o si era lo mismo que le havia passado entre los dos y para ello le ynterponia la obediencia de Nuestro Reverendisimo que para ello llevaba y se la interpuso tan bien el Reverendo Padre Provincial de aquella provincia que alli estaba y su confesor.

After writing down the things she told me, I wished to depart from her company, and I showed her what I wrote so that she might tell me if I might have been mistaken in any point, or if it was written as told during our meeting, and for this purpose I invoked the requirement of obedience imposed by the Reverend Commissary General (which I brought for this reason), as did the Reverend Father Provincial of that province, who was there, and her confessor.⁶⁶

The nun's letter is very different in tone and in apparent aim from the friar's exuberant missive. It is clear hers is the submissive voice, and her message has less to do with New Mexico and native populations specifically and more to do with a desire to participate in the conversions and to encourage the friars in their evangelization. Her tone is self-effacing, as she calls herself "*el sujeto mas ynutil e yncapas en su efecto para manifestar la fuersa de su poderosa mano*" (the most useless and powerless subject to exercise the force of God's powerful hand). She says that she is obeying the command from her superiors to reveal the contents of her notebooks, in which her travels were recorded. Regarding the conversions in New Mexico, she states, "*me mandan diga lo que se contiene en estos cuadernos*" (they order that I say what is contained in these notebooks).

Sor María adds little to a narrative ostensibly about her. She comments that she was taken to other places before she appeared in New Mexico, that she first headed east to Quivira and to the Jumanos, and that she was helped in her travels by six angels.⁶⁷ She says that some of the indigenous tribes she observed resisted conversion and the Franciscan friars because "*el demonio los tiene engañados asiendoles creer que . . . ande estar sujetos y esclabos siendo christianos consistiendo su libertad y felisidad en esta vida*" (the devil has them tricked, making them believe . . . that they will become subjects and slaves, though being Christians comprises their liberty and happiness in this life).⁶⁸ Sor María repeats the specific recommendation that only soldiers "*de buena vida y costumbres y que con apasibilidad sufran las contumelias que se les pueden ofreser*" (of good habits and reputable lifestyle, who might patiently suffer the difficulties that may befall them) be allowed into the mission field. She reiterates the dates Benavides set out for her travels, noting that the Quivira and Jumanos were the last nations she visited.

She reminds the Franciscan friars that their mission in New Mexico is particularly blessed, and that they must advance the propagation of the faith: “alégrense Vuestras Paternidades mías, pues el Sr. les a dado la oportunidad, ocasión y suerte de los Apostoles. No la pierdan. Por entender y pensar el trabajo acuerdense lo que le toca obedecer a el altísimo y dilatar y siembre su santa fee” (Rejoice, my dear Fathers, for the Lord has provided you with the opportunity, moment, and fortune of the apostles. Do not lose sight of this. In understanding and thinking about the labor involved, remember what is required to obey the Lord, and spread and sow his Holy Faith).⁶⁹

She assures them that “con sierta siensia y lus que los bienaventurados los ynbidian” (with certain science and light, the faithful departed envy you) for the conversions they accomplish on earth, and that “si pudieran dejar la Gloria que tienen por acompañarles en estas conversiones lo ysieran” (if they could abandon the glory they enjoy to accompany the friars in these conversions, they would), concepts that are later invoked in the mission context in New Spain. Sor María assures them of the value and importance of their work, in which she herself wishes she could participate, and for which she offers “de todo Corazon y alma ayudar con oraciones y ejerisios y los de esta comunidad” (to help with all my heart and soul through prayer and religious devotions, and with those of this religious community).⁷⁰ Sor María closes her letter by reiterating that she wrote and gave to Benavides these revelations under a vow of obedience, hoping that her words will stay with the friars in the New Mexico *custodia*, who are particularly blessed.⁷¹

The letter then returns to Benavides, closing by claiming there is more of Sor María’s and his own testimony about her travels, but “son mas para guardarlas en el Corazon” (they are best kept safe in the heart). He brings the discussion back to more mundane issues pertaining to himself and to the New Mexico mission field, referencing the political conflict between religious and secular groups in the region, reminding the friars not to be discouraged by the difficulties they face in the mission field, and mentioning his own desire to return to New Mexico. He assures the friars that he continually works to secure the support of the Crown and the Real Consejo de Indias and that the Franciscan Order considers Sor María’s travels a blessing particular to them: “deven tenerse por dichosos de ser patrosinados desta vendita alma Maria de Jesus que alla los a bisto y los encomienda a Dios” (you should consider your-

selves fortunate to be championed by that blessed soul, María de Jesús, who has seen you there [in New Mexico] and who entrusts you to the Lord).⁷² Benavides reiterates Sor María's and his own wishes for the friars and the tribes,⁷³ and reminds his readers that the unusual events recounted in the narrative pertain to a very real earthly context, one contested and carefully considered in religious and secular circles.⁷⁴ But Benavides still had a few things to say about the Lady in Blue narrative, which he revealed in his *1634 Memorial*.

TWO LADIES IN BLUE: SOR MARÍA DE JESÚS AND LUISA DE CARRIÓN IN BENAVIDES'S *1634 MEMORIAL*

Because the *1634 Memorial* was written with just one audience in mind—Pope Urban VIII—the text's overall emphasis is on spiritual gains rather than material ones.⁷⁵ It also focuses particularly on the Franciscan Order's achievements in the New Mexican mission field to establish their primacy there. Other documents written by Benavides, dated 1633 and 1634, indicate that the *1634 Memorial* was one text from a suite of materials regarding the New Mexico *custodia* that promoted its elevation to a province.⁷⁶ Pope Urban VIII wielded significant influence over the Spanish Crown and its decisions regarding the allocation of funds and political support of specific religious orders and groups in the Americas. Appealing directly to the pope on behalf of Franciscan missionaries and New Mexican friars was a strategy for gaining support for them from above.

Benavides's 1634 version of the narrative repeats many elements laid out in the *1630 Memorial*: the Jumano procession to greet the friars; the raising of arms to ask for baptism; and the healing of the sick. He specifies by name two neighboring tribes ("naciones comarcanas"⁷⁷) who sought out the Franciscans after they healed the sick—the Xapies and the Quivira—for whom the friars pledged to build a church.⁷⁸

However, the *1634 Memorial* changes the Lady in Blue narrative in two major ways. First, Benavides claims that he had heard the news about Sor María while still in New Mexico in 1629. He states that in 1629, thirty friars arrived from Mexico and brought with them knowledge about Sor María that had been relayed to them by the archbishop of Mexico (Manso y Zúñiga); the archbishop, in turn, had been informed

by Spanish sources: “en España corría voz de que una Religiosa llamada María de Jesús . . . era llevada milagrosamente al Nuevo México a predicar nuestra Santa Fe católica a aquellos indios bárbaros” (in Spain, it was rumored that a woman religious named Sor María de Jesús . . . was miraculously taken to New Mexico to preach our Holy Faith to those barbarous Indians).⁷⁹ Benavides goes on to reproduce the two paragraphs that appeared in the Zárate Salmerón account nearly verbatim, but without citing any particular source.⁸⁰ He adds that Manso y Zúñiga had been informed about Sor María’s travels while in Spain by a person of repute (“persona de crédito”)⁸¹ and brought news of her when he came to Mexico to occupy the archbishopric in 1629. According to Benavides, when this information arrived in New Mexico, he and the other friars reconsidered “el grande cuidado y solicitud con que los Indios Xumanas nos venían a pedir frailes cada verano para que los fuesen a bautizar era alguna moción del cielo” (the great care and solicitude with which the Jumano Indians would come every summer to ask for friars to baptize them, which we had taken to be a heavenly intervention).⁸²

Benavides claims he was convinced the Lady in Blue might be Sor María because of the tribes’ shared reaction to the portrait of Luisa de Carrión, whose likeness to Sor María they unequivocally confirmed.⁸³ Benavides writes that the friars in New Mexico were convinced that “aquella religiosa era la Madre María de Jesús contenida en aquella relación del Arzobispo que merecía ser apóstol de dios milagrosamente” (that woman religious was the Mother María de Jesús contained in the account of the archbishop, who must have been the miraculous apostle of God).⁸⁴ In this version of the narrative, Benavides and the friars were convinced that Sor María was the woman who visited New Mexico and converted the Jumano tribe, in conformation with the archbishop’s letter, and the friars who arrived to New Mexico in 1630 were aware of this fact and had been charged with investigating it further.

Benavides does not cite Zárate Salmerón as his source for this information and does not mention Zárate Salmerón at all in the *1630 Memorial*, but he does include the friar in the *1634 Memorial*’s chapter on Taos Pueblo, where the friar had worked. This suggests at the very least that Benavides became familiar with Zárate Salmerón at some point, if not that he had read Zárate Salmerón’s *Relaciones* and borrowed from it. In claiming that he knew about Sor María while in New Mexico, and then

citing the account from Zárate Salmerón's text, Benavides radically changes his presentation of the Lady in Blue narrative in this version; he creates a role for himself in creating institutional knowledge of her in New Mexico.

The second major difference in the *1634 Memorial's* version of the narrative is unique to this document: Benavides names another female mystical missionary to New Mexico. In the *1630 Memorial*, Benavides reports that a blind child at the Moqui (Hopi) Pueblo had been cured by one of the friars using a cross belonging to the famed Spanish nun Madre Luisa de Carrión.⁸⁵ As Benavides explains in the text, the commissary general of the Indies, Juan de Santander, who had given his approval for the *1630 Memorial's* publication, became convinced that Luisa de Carrión "era la contenida en aquella memoria del Arzobispo de México" (she who was mentioned in the archbishop of Mexico's account).⁸⁶ Santander sent Benavides to talk to Madre Carrión's confessor, Fray Domingo de Aspe, while Benavides was in Spain. Aspe showed Benavides a book of revelations⁸⁷ that showed that a year and a half before Benavides's arrival in Spain, Madre Carrión "había sido llevada milagrosamente . . . a las conversiones de Nuevo Mexico" (had been miraculously taken . . . to the conversions in New Mexico).⁸⁸ Benavides was not permitted to transcribe the contents of the book of revelations, but based on what Aspe shows him, he concludes that Madre Carrión must have shared the ability to mystically evangelize in New Mexico with Sor María.

In response to this new development, Benavides presents the following resolution:

Infiero por ciertísimo ser la madre María la que milagrosamente va a predicar a las naciones del Nuevo México que caen al oriente como son los Xumanas, Japies y Quiviras y otros reinos que ella propia me dijo con evidentes señales. Y que la Madre Luisa es asimismo llevada milagrosamente a las conversiones del occidente del Nuevo México como son los Apaches de Navajo . . . y a las provincias de Cuñi y Moqui adonde fue el milagro de la cruz.

I take as absolutely certain that Mother María is she who miraculously travels to preach to the nations of New Mexico that are located to the east, such as the Jumanos, Japies, and Quiviras, and

other kingdoms that she herself told me about with clear indications. And that in the same way, Mother Luisa is miraculously taken to the conversions in the west of New Mexico, such as those of the Apaches de Navajo . . . and to the provinces of Zuñi and Moqui [Hopi] where the miracle of the cross occurred.⁸⁹

According to this version of the narrative, Sor María evangelized in the eastern regions of New Mexico, while Madre Carrión ministered in the west. After this startling revelation and change to the narrative, Benavides offers no further details of their travel or discussion of the matter, adding only that there is more proof which he does not include, as he deems it inappropriate to share while the two women lived.⁹⁰

Madre Luisa de Carrión was a well-known mystic in Spain whose reliquary, including the pictures and crosses Benavides mentions in the *1630 Memorial*, were so prevalent in the Spanish colonies that the Church issued an edict banning their sale and circulation, as Madre Carrión had not been beatified.⁹¹ This may explain her popularity and connection with the idea of the New Mexico mission field. Yet Luisa de Carrión is never again mentioned in a significant manner in later readings of the Lady in Blue narrative.

This may be in part because the *1634 Memorial's* reading audience was small; the text was meant to be read in Rome by the pope, and there is no evidence it was ever printed. As a result, very few readers then or now are familiar with the extraordinary modifications to the narrative Benavides presented in it. Urban VIII's thoughts on the matter are the subject for another study, but the *1634 Memorial* was Benavides's last major documented work. In spite of his desire to return to New Mexico as its bishop, Benavides left Spain for Goa, India, to assume the position of auxiliary bishop, and is said to have died en route.⁹²

RECKONING THE LADY IN BLUE WITH THE MYSTICAL WRITER: JOSEPH XIMÉNEZ SAMANIEGO'S *VITA* OF SOR MARÍA

The versions of the Lady in Blue narrative discussed up to this point were all written within a narrow time frame, approximately 1626–34, and from the point of view of early New Mexican missionaries writing with their patrons and superiors in mind. The writers' objectives lay in

the development of the missions in and around New Mexico, and the narrative was one part of their complex negotiations, transatlantic and secular/religious. In contrast, the Lady in Blue narrative in Sor María's saint's life, or *vita*, is instead written in relationship to Sor María, the woman who was made answerable for the narrative during her lifetime. Published several decades after the other versions of the Lady in Blue narrative were written, Sor María's *vita* was composed by Franciscan friar Joseph Ximénez Samaniego. Ximénez Samaniego knew Sor María personally during her life and championed her writing and her case for sainthood after her death.⁹³

As with any holy biography, the purpose of the *vita* was to show Sor María's spirituality in its best light, and to emphasize those aspects of her life that suggested the type of extraordinary holiness that could lead to her beatification. The Lady in Blue narrative in the *vita* is focused more on the significance of her mystical travel in the context of the nun's life and writing (in particular the difficult questions about the nature of her travel that she was compelled to answer), and less on its impact in relationship to the New Spanish mission field and the Franciscan Order.⁹⁴ And, most importantly in terms of the circulation of the Lady in Blue narrative, the *vita* prefaced almost all editions of *La mística ciudad de dios*.

The *vita*'s version of Sor María's travels shares elements in common with the 1630 *Memorial* and the 1631 letter, drawing on secondary sources (such as Inquisition documents) that referenced or commented on those texts. The *vita* says little about Benavides, and is silent on Zárate Salmerón; further, Ximénez Samaniego does not appear to have met either friar. Yet Ximénez Samaniego's rise to leadership within the Franciscan Order undoubtedly familiarized him with Sor María's Inquisition process and its documentation. The *vita* he wrote ensured that this remarkable episode from Sor María's youth did not detract from her candidacy for sainthood, or from her authorship of *La mística ciudad de dios*.

The Lady in Blue narrative appears in the twelfth chapter of Sor María's *vita*, contextualized within several chapters dedicated to her early life in the family home/convent and the *exterioridades* she experienced as a young woman. Although its subtitle, "Maravillosa conversión de infieles" (Marvelous Conversion of Infidels), echoes the title Benavides gave to the episode in his two *Memorials*, neither of the friar's texts

is cited explicitly. Instead, Sor María's travels are framed as a manifestation of her desire to participate in the work of conversion in far-off places: "se ofrecia a padecer mucho mas y a dar la vida si fuesse necesario para que una sola alma se salvasse" (she offered to suffer much more and even to give her life if it were necessary to save even one soul).⁹⁵ Ximénez Samaniego is careful to present Sor María in the least controversial light, and he takes pains to ensure that her spiritual travels are seen as authentic and personal. According to Ximénez Samaniego's version of the narrative, during Sor María's early ecstasies God showed her the entire world, but through neither sight, nor sound, nor physical presence; rather, she observed all through abstract means.⁹⁶ Her concern for the souls of the unconverted *infieles* made these experiences "un amargo y cariñoso tormenta" (a bitter and loving torment). During these trips she was shown a group of non-Christians to whom God's mercy was particularly directed: the gentiles of New Mexico and nearby regions.⁹⁷ As she visited these places again and again, and achieved a greater understanding of the land and disposition of its people, Sor María prayed strenuously for their conversion. The result of her humble diligence was a miracle of great proportions: "el Señor . . . obró en ella, y por ella una de las mayores maravillas, que han admirado los siglos" (the Lord . . . worked in her and through her one of the greatest miracles seen in centuries). Here, Ximénez Samaniego responds to the skepticism—and shows a bit of the celebrity—with which Sor María's mystical conversions were treated during her lifetime and after.

Circumspect in explaining the nature of Sor María's travels, Ximénez Samaniego recounts how, once while praying, she was suddenly taken to a new place by means unclear to her.⁹⁸ It seemed to her she experienced everything in her new environment in a sensory way, seeing "ocularmente, que percibía sensiblemente el temple más calido de la tierra y que experimentaba los demás sentidos aquella diversidad" (visually, that she perceived through her senses the earth's hottest atmosphere and the rest of her senses likewise took in a diversity of impressions). These points of clarification regarding what her travel was like were indirect responses to earlier interrogations by the Spanish Inquisition and superiors in the Franciscan Order regarding the specific means by which she traveled. Sor María channeled her anxiety about this experience into compassion for the people she visited, to whom she preached the Holy Faith.⁹⁹ According to Ximénez Samaniego, Sor María thought that she

preached to the tribes in Spanish, but they understood her as if she spoke to them in their own language. Before returning to her convent, she was fully occupied in the faraway territories, where “*hacía maravillas en confirmación de la Fe que predicaba*” (wrought miracles in confirmation of the Faith she preached).

Ximénez Samaniego asserts that the nun made more than five hundred visits to New Mexico.¹⁰⁰ His account reiterates many elements of the Benavides texts, repeating that Sor María converted an indigenous nation and its prince, met the Franciscan friars working in New Mexico, and asked the members of the converted nation to seek out the friars for baptism. Ximénez Samaniego declares that many more remarkable things happened while she was on her travels, but omits them, claiming they were so numerous that it would take too much time to cite them all (“*sería muy largo el referir*”).¹⁰¹

As with the preface to *La mística ciudad de dios*, the *vita*’s purpose was to promote Sor María’s sanctity, but more specifically to underscore her legitimacy as the author of the book itself (a point that Rome repeatedly questioned after Sor María’s death). For this reason, this version of the narrative focused on a specific detail of Sor María’s travel that had been of great interest to the nun’s critics: the means by which she traveled to and was present in New Mexico. Sor María was examined by the Inquisition twice during her lifetime, and she testified about her travels and her writing. Sometime in the 1650s, she wrote a letter to the vice-commissary general of the Franciscan Order, Pedro Manero, in which she addressed persistent questions about her bilocations.¹⁰² Over time, Sor María’s responses to these questions had varied, and reflected not only uncertainty on her part regarding the nature of her travel but, understandably, her caution and reluctance before powerful Inquisition officials. She commented in her letter to Manero that her experiences had been “exaggerated or misunderstood” by Benavides and others who spread the narrative and that “neither then nor now was, or am, I capable of knowing the way [my travels] happened.”¹⁰³

In the 1670 *vita*, Ximénez Samaniego cites Sor María’s letter to Manero, quoting the nun’s own canny reply to questions about whether her travel was corporeal or not: “*Si fue ir, o no, real y verdaderamente con el cuerpo, no puedo yo asegurarlo, y no es mucho lo dude, pues San Pablo estaba a mejor luz y confiesa de si fue llevado al tercer Cielo, y que no sabe, si fue en cuerpo o fuera de él*” (If the travel were or were

not really and truly carried out in my body, I could not myself be sure, and this doubt should not be surprising, for Saint Paul was more enlightened than I, and he did not know whether, if taken to the third Heaven, it was in his body or out of it).¹⁰⁴ Sor María's elegant indirect response underscores the stakes that were riding on the issue of physical spiritual travel, and it highlights her immense knowledge, political awareness, and skill in answering (how could she, a simple woman, know how she traveled if the great St. Paul did not know?). Ximénez Samaniego's citation of Sor María's response shows that his "official" version of the narrative had to take into account how she herself responded to questions regarding her travel, as it calculated how to most favorably present the issue.

Ximénez Samaniego writes that Sor María definitely traveled in some manner, and offers reasons for why she could have traveled in her body, though he avoids making a definitive claim. He reasons that Sor María perceived her surroundings through her senses—she experienced day, night, and weather conditions in various locations, and left rosaries with the people she converted, having them in her possession at the beginning of her raptures and returning without them.¹⁰⁵ The *vita* represents a Sor María who modestly believed that she had voyaged in her spirit, not her body, and later speculated that perhaps she had dreamed the bilocation experiences (though, when asked, she typically confirmed that she had indeed traveled). Sor María's confessor was convinced that she had traveled in her body, and in his account Ximénez Samaniego deduces that her confessor helped circulate this idea throughout Spain, noting that it is difficult to keep secrets of this nature under wraps: "es tan difícil, que secretos de este género, ya conferidos, se guarden" (it is so difficult to keep such secrets, once they are conferred). Given these various complexities and the difficulty of ascertaining the precise nature of her travel—to say nothing of the potential risk for Sor María in laying claim to certain types of travel—Ximénez Samaniego says only that "la verdad cierta" (the honest truth) was that someone, either Sor María or an angel that looked like her, had appeared in New Mexico.¹⁰⁶ Further, this travel was not the work of the devil ("no era cosa del demonio"), for the Lord made very clear to Sor María the integrity of her efforts.¹⁰⁷

Ximénez Samaniego then recounts parts of the narrative that originated in the 1630 *Memorial*. He leaves out Benavides as the author,

writing the friar into the background, and adding details. According to the *vita*'s version of the Lady in Blue, the friars in New Mexico were not anticipating the visit from the "infeles," namely, the Jumanos, nor had they heard of Sor María from the archbishop's letter. (These points run counter to what Benavides claims in the 1634 *Memorial* but are consistent with what he wrote in the 1631 letter.) The friars then show the tribal members a portrait of Luisa de Carrión, because of her fame in Spain at that time.¹⁰⁸ The friar accompanies the unidentified tribesmen back to their home in the "hasta entonces incógnitas provincias" (until then unknown provinces) after they request baptism from the friars. Sor María's preaching had left the tribes "tan bien catequizados, que sin otra instrucción, pudieron bautizarlos . . . por tener la Sierva de Dios tan bien dispuestos, con tan maravillosa predicación aquellas almas" (so well catechized that without additional instruction, [the friars] could baptize them . . . since the Servant of God had them so well disposed, through her wondrous preaching to those souls). In Ximénez Samaniego's account, Benavides's travel to Spain was motivated by these mysterious conversions, and finding out who had taught them was the primary objective of his visit.¹⁰⁹

Ximénez Samaniego then makes careful note by name of all the male figures who were involved in the meeting between Sor María and Benavides at her convent, as if to redirect possible critique away from her by reminding readers that she was surrounded by male superiors who elicited and possibly elaborated her testimony. He identifies the Comisario General Fray Bernardino Sena as an "ocular testigo" (visual witness) to Sor María's travels and determines that she was the instrument through which the miracles were accomplished.¹¹⁰ Ximénez Samaniego lists Benavides; Fray Sebastián Marcilla, the provincial of Burgos and Sor María's former confessor; and Fray Francisco Andrés de la Torre, Sor María's confessor at the time, all who together visited the Ágreda convent and compelled Sor María to cooperate with their questioning: "haciendo sacrificio de su secreto, en obsequio de la obediencia, se confesó con sincera verdad lo que a cerca de la materia le avia sucedido" (sacrificing her secret, in honor of the call to obedience, she confessed with sincere veracity all that had happened to her concerning the event). Out of this meeting, these men composed "una relación de todos estos sucesos y lo que a cerca de ellos la Sierva de Dios avia declarado" (an account of all these events and that which the Servant of God had

said about them), and left the account with de la Torre. Ximénez Samaniego does not provide any more information about this report.

Referencing the letter by Benavides and Sor María, Ximénez Samaniego confirms that Sor María helped to compose an exhortative letter to the friars in New Mexico, encouraging them in the constant pursuit of their holy occupation.¹¹¹ He attributes the spread of the news about Sor María's voyages to Benavides. The friar, "aunque sabia quan importante era, que tan inauditos secretos no publicassen en España, viviendo la sierva de Dios" (although he knew how important it was not to publicize such secrets in Spain, since the Servant of God was still alive), nevertheless told many people in Spain, and the events were made public ("se hicieron públicos").¹¹² Although undoubtedly Benavides and others, including Sor María's confessors Fray Marcilla and de la Torre, spread the news of her bilocation in Spain, Ximénez Samaniego's mention of this in the *vita* exonerates Sor María from any suggestion of self-promotion relating to the mystical travels. Ximénez Samaniego reflects—seemingly incorrectly—on Benavides's fate after the visit to Sor María's convent, believing that Benavides returned to New Mexico and personally shared the letter with the friars there.

Ximénez Samaniego adds that Benavides wrote another "relación" (account) regarding these events, which included Sor María's letter in it. Ximénez Samaniego claims that Benavides left a copy of it in the *custodia's* archive for posterity.¹¹³ Although the title of this later document is not revealed, it would seem he is referring to the 1631 letter from Benavides and Sor María discussed above. The year before Ximénez Samaniego wrote the *vita*, "un tanto" (an excerpt) of that archival letter was sent from the archives by the Comisario General de Nueva España to the *procurador* of the Province of Santo Evangelio, Mateo de Heredia. The document was to be presented at the Real Consejo de Indias as evidence of the Franciscans' work in the region, which was threatened by "cierta emulación, que le pretendía obscurecer esta gloria" (a certain emulation, that sought to obscure this glory).¹¹⁴ This was perhaps a gibe at the other orders competing for a foothold in the frontier missions. Ximénez Samaniego claims that the letter arrived to him spontaneously, and he clearly incorporated its contents and a discussion about it in the *vita*.¹¹⁵ In his conclusion, Ximénez Samaniego says of the testimonies concerning Sor María's travels to New Mexico that he has pursued them, thinking this effort worthwhile—"helos proseguido, pareciendome la digression precisa" (I have pursued them, believing the digression

necessary)—because such miracles should not be referenced without first looking into them—“prodigios tan singulares no se refieren bien sin su comprobación” (such singular marvels are not well recounted without first being verified). As Ximénez Samaniego frames it, the chapter dedicated to Sor María’s spiritual travels of conversion was a digression from the *vita*’s main focus, but was an episode in her life that had to be addressed, both to give it the weight it merited in the context of her biography and to discredit any critique of Sor María on the basis of her travels. In Ximénez Samaniego’s version of the Lady in Blue narrative, Sor María’s mystical travels were but one part, albeit an important one, of a larger work dedicated to Sor María as a spiritual writer and holy figure.

READING THE LADY IN BLUE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: PUBLICATION, CIRCULATION, AND ACCESSIBILITY

Taken together, these early versions of the Lady in Blue comprise the foundation from which the narrative was popularized. But given differences in accessibility to each—and therefore variation in scope of readership—they played different roles in shaping later interpretations of the narrative. Not all versions were equally influential during the colonial period, and some have been attributed more influence than they actually exerted in their time.

As we know, not all of the texts were published: Zárate Salermón’s “Relación de la Santa Madre María de Jesús” and Benavides’s 1634 *Memorial* remained in manuscript form during the colonial period, according to bibliographies and printing records from the epoch. Though recent scholarship draws attention to the manuscript as a prestige literary form during the early colonial period, it does not appear that these two texts circulated to a significant degree in this manner.¹¹⁶ As a result, these versions were read by the smallest audiences, and they therefore exerted lesser influence on general understanding of the narrative (what was repeated by mission friars, and in later chronicles and histories).¹¹⁷ We are unlikely to know for certain whether Benavides read Zárate Salmerón’s *Relaciones*, or if Zárate Salmerón was his source for information on Sor María, but it is evident that few of his time and later knew about Zárate Salmerón’s discussion of the Lady in Blue.¹¹⁸

The intended audience of Benavides's 1634 *Memorial* was limited to begin with. The fact that virtually no subsequent colonial-era discussion of the Lady in Blue narrative mentions Luisa de Carrión as a mystical missionary contemporary of Sor María's suggests that few outside of Rome read this document. One wonders how Pope Urban VIII and his advisors interpreted the 1634 *Memorial*, given Benavides's speedy departure to Goa shortly after submitting the report instead of to the leadership position he sought in New Mexico.¹¹⁹

Recent readings of the Lady in Blue narrative argue for the 1630 *Memorial*'s popularity during the colonial period. But archival sources do not bear this hypothesis out. In fact, as early twentieth-century historian Henry Raupp Wagner remarked, "very few of the later writers on New Mexico or on María Jesús de Agreda mention [the 1630 *Memorial*]." ¹²⁰ Wagner's assertion bears mentioning to avoid overstating the importance of the 1630 *Memorial* in the colonial period, both as a source document and as a means of popularization of the narrative. This misconception may have arisen in Anglophone scholarship due to the repeated publication of the 1630 *Memorial* in English translation in the twentieth century, creating the sense that it must have been equally accessible in its day, or simply creating greater accessibility to the document by scholars.¹²¹ This does not appear to have been the case, for although the 1630 *Memorial* was printed in four languages in Europe in the early seventeenth century, its circulation outside of Europe appears to have been small.¹²² Most significantly, any discussion of Sor María in conjunction with the Lady in Blue would necessarily have been informed by one of the other versions of the narrative, as the 1630 *Memorial* does not name Sor María explicitly. Although important in 1630–31 for increasing visibility for the New Mexico missions, the 1630 *Memorial*'s Lady in Blue was not as dominant as were later versions of the narrative.

The greatest number of readers of the narrative accessed the 1631 letter to the friars in New Mexico and the *vita* that prefaced *La mística ciudad de dios*. There are many layers of reading for the 1631 letter because it was distributed and read in manuscript and print forms. Archival documents, including some discussed in my later chapters, reference manuscript copies of the letter circulating among Spanish and New Spanish Franciscans in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The precise distribution parameters for the manuscript of the letter are difficult to measure, but we get a sense that it arrived to a number of readers within the Church and Franciscan Order. Sor María addressed

the claims in a letter to Fray Pedro Manero in the 1650s, suggesting that as a manuscript, it had an influential and significant group of readers in seventeenth-century Spain.

Ximénez Samaniego notes in the *vita* that he received an excerpt of the 1631 letter as he wrote the holy biography. The friar does not specify who sent it to him from the New Spanish archive where the original was located or why it was sent to him, but the fact that he was sent it at all suggests that copying and circulating this text was not uncommon in the later seventeenth century, both in Spain and in Mexico.

The version of the letter Ximénez Samaniego received directly informed the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Franciscan missionaries who established missions in the New Spanish borderlands. Ximénez Samaniego was involved in the establishment of the Propaganda Fide colleges in Mexico, where missionaries were trained in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ximénez Samaniego shared his copy of the 1631 letter with Fray Antonio Llinás, the founding friar of the Propaganda Fide colleges in Mexico. Fray Damián Manzanet, who with Llinás established the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Querétaro, traveled to Texas in 1689 to found missions there. In his a letter to Mexican polymath Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, Manzanet indicates that he had a copy of the letter given to Llinás before the friars left Spain for Mexico: “Una carta que para en mi poder la qual dieron en Madrid a nuestro Padre Fray Antonio Llinás la cual carta hace mención de lo que la Beata Madre María de Jesús de Agreda comunicó en su Convento al Padre Custodio del Nuevo México Fray Alonso de Benavides y dice la B. Madre como estuvo muchas veces al Nuevo México” (A letter that I have in my possession, which they gave to our Father Antonio Llinás in Madrid, and in which the letter mentions what the Blessed Mother María de Jesús de Ágreda communicated in her convent to the father custodian of New Mexico, Fray Alonso de Benavides, and the Blessed Mother says that she was in New Mexico many times).¹²³ Manzanet was inspired by the 1631 letter to join in the Mexican mission endeavor: “por estas noticias que yo traía de España y juntamente vine al ministerio de la conversión de los infieles pasé y estuve en las misiones de Coahuila” (on the basis of this news I brought from Spain, and it came to pass that I came to the ministry of the conversion of infidels and I was in the Coahuila missions).¹²⁴ Several other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Propaganda Fide friars also wrote that they had their own copies of the letter,

prior to its 1730 publication in Mexico; hence, they must have possessed manuscript copies.

Although Ximénez Samaniego's name is not mentioned directly in Manzanet's letter, he likely sanctioned the 1631 letter's distribution among the mission friars of Propaganda Fide. He certainly appears to have made other efforts to see the 1631 letter associated with the northern New Spanish mission field. A 1776 *Manifiesto* sent from the Propaganda Fide College of San Fernando in Mexico City states that Ximénez Samaniego sent "un tanto" (a selection) of the letter to Fray Mateo Heredia, the procurador of the Province of New Mexico at the Spanish court, so that it could be presented to the Real Consejo de Indias with other documents proving the order's conversion efforts in the New World.¹²⁵ In Franciscan and religious circles, and among the Propaganda Fide college friars in Mexico, Ximénez Samaniego's copy of the 1631 letter written by Benavides and Sor María was shared, informing ideas about the northern New Spanish borderlands and its missions. Within this limited but influential group, the manuscript letter's version of the narrative circulated and exercised its effect.

The published version of the letter is a different matter. Published three times in Mexico during the eighteenth century, it reached a much broader audience in New Spain than did the manuscript version of the 1631 letter. Although bibliographer José Toribio Medina documents the publication of the letter in Mexico in 1631, other historians strongly disagree that it was published then, claiming that Medina and other bibliographers cite the same misinterpreted document.¹²⁶ Three other documented printings of the letter in Mexico cluster together in the mid-eighteenth century: 1730, 1747, and 1760.¹²⁷ The *Tanto que se sacó de una carta* will be examined in greater depth in chapter 3 in the context of works of Sor María's writing published on Mexican presses. In this context, as a document that presented a particular version of the Lady in Blue narrative, it is significant because its publication resulted in greater accessibility to its version of the narrative, and its repeated publication suggests that whoever sponsored its publication pressed for its continued presence in the public sphere. It was clearly very influential in the public perception of Sor María as the protagonist of the Lady in Blue narrative in colonial Mexico.

Sor María's *vita*, part of the preface to *La mística ciudad de dios*, seems to have brought the narrative to the greatest number of general

readers. Wagner notes in his discussion of the Lady in Blue, “For the miraculous conversions of which Benavides writes, not his book [the 1630 *Memorial*] is quoted, but Ximénez Samaniego’s Life of the Nun.”¹²⁸ Not only was the *vita* published with almost all editions of *La mística ciudad de dios*, it was also printed as a separate document, the *Relación de la vida de la V. Madre Sor María de Jesús*.¹²⁹ Many editions of the *Relación de la vida* were published in Spain by the propaganda press dedicated to her case for canonization (discussed in chapter 2), and copies of the *Relación de la vida* were present in the libraries of the College of Santa Cruz de Querétaro, and among the holdings of other colonial-era Mexican collections. Although the *Relación de la vida* did not equal *La mística ciudad de dios* in the extent of its publication, it was nonetheless printed and distributed to an impressive degree, and undoubtedly contributed to the reading of the Lady in Blue narrative by a significant transatlantic audience.

If one were to measure readership of the narrative by considering only the number of copies of the narrative published, then the most robust physical circulation of the Lady in Blue narrative was achieved through *La mística ciudad de dios*. That is, Sor María’s *own writing* was the primary vehicle for the popularization of the Lady in Blue narrative. As I will detail in chapter 2, *La mística ciudad de dios*, a Marian treatise written by Sor María that addressed the theological question of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, was repeatedly printed in Spain from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century. Although documented printings of *La mística ciudad de dios* in Mexico are few, the book was sent en masse to Mexico from Spain, as I will show in chapter 3, and its documented presence in libraries, private collections, and other venues suggests a significant community of readers for the text—and its version of the Lady in Blue narrative—in Mexico. New Spanish readers of *La mística ciudad de dios* were familiar with the Lady in Blue narrative through the book’s preface, and the two concepts of the nun—mystical missionary and author—complemented each other in New Spanish thought and culture, as chapters 3 and 4 will illustrate.

La mística ciudad de dios was important for reasons other than the circulation of the Lady in Blue narrative. It was frequently published, often read and cited, and rendered into artwork, theater, and even satire. Chapter 2 explores why this was the case and how it came to be in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spain.

