

Ancient Jumano Indians meet ‘The Lady in Blue’

By Tom Ashmore

(Before you read this incredible story you should understand that this is absolutely true, backed up by many investigations and supporting documentation from the Vatican and the Government of Spain.)



Life along the Concho River and its tributaries in 1623 was peaceful for the Jumano Indians. They had everything they needed. The clear spring-fed creeks gave them an abundance of fish and mollusks, and it was the all-important lifeblood for the deer and other wildlife throughout the area. Their seasonal harvests of pecans were unsurpassed and the buffalo came through every winter, providing them with meat and hides. They were a blessed people and because of its bounty, the Concho River was the heart of the Jumano nation.

There were some 10,000 Jumano Indians spread throughout the area and due to their central location they were traders with the other Indian nations as far west as what we now know to be New Mexico, east to Louisiana, south to the coast, and north to the Texas panhandle area. They traded their pecans, pearls from the Concho River, buffalo skins, and their powerful bows used to take down the buffalo.



Jumano grinding holes on Dove Creek

The Jumano were a fair skinned Indian with a pleasant disposition. The men cut their hair short in a bowl like shape and the women wore their hair long. They preferred to tattoo their bodies with decorations, making them very distinctive in appearance.



In 1623 the Jumano had only seen the white man once before and that was nearly 90 years prior when a party of four shipwrecked Spaniards were escorted through their nation on a journey to the west. The Spaniards reported reaching a village now known to be on the Concho River consisting of “hundreds of huts.” They were treated with great respect during their visit

and the Jumano continued to escort them along their western trade route to the Horsehead crossing of the Pecos River and on into what is now New Mexico. Their reports after returning to Mexico stirred great interest and over the next century many expeditions were sent into the far west area of Texas and New Mexico, but none of the expeditions traveled back to the Concho River area.

By 1623 the Spanish had established themselves in New Mexico and a religious Franciscan monastery was established near what is now Albuquerque. Imagine the surprise of the Fray, Juan De Salas, when a delegation of twelve Jumano Indians showed up at the monastery in 1623 requesting to be baptized and for missionaries to be sent to their country so they could continue their Christian education. The request was indeed intriguing. How did these Indians receive Christian teachings if their missionaries had never traveled to their lands? They told him that they had learned about Jesus Christ from the “white skinned” “Lady in Blue” who came to visit them. Fray De Salas could not understand what they were talking about and he had no missionaries to send anyway, so the request was denied. The delegation returned to their homeland but returned every year for the next six years putting forth the same request and each time being denied.



Original map of the New Mexico mission location

What the Franciscan priest did not know at the time was that three years earlier an 18-year-old nun of the Franciscan Order of Agreda in Spain named Mary began reporting mystic raptures during her meditations. She reported having spiritual journeys to faraway lands, meeting savages and telling them the Word of Christ. She reported to her spiritual advisor and her convent sisters that she made as many as four trips per month and was able to speak to the savages in their own tongue. In her spiritual travels she guided the Indians in building crosses, places of worship, and showed them how to make rosaries. The Indians later said that it was at Mary's urging that they returned each year to make their requests to the Franciscan priest in New Mexico. They reported that when she appeared she would come from the sky and preach the Gospel to them. The Order of Agreda was a convent in which the nuns never left. The chosen color of cloaks over their habits was blue.

Mary's description of her travels were so detailed that in 1622 the Franciscan Minister General met with her to hear her stories. He was so taken with her details, sincerity, and spiritual insight that he gave his blessing in 1626 for the convent's padre to write a letter to the Archbishop of Mexico to see if her descriptions and events could be verified. The archbishop, in turn, sent an inquiry to Father Benavides, the Superior of the Franciscan Mission of all of New Mexico. The letter was hand carried from Mexico City to New Mexico by a personal emissary of the archbishop. The emissary arrived in New Mexico with a caravan of 30 priests and military escort on July 3rd, 1629. Coincidentally, the annual trek of the Jumano Indians to New Mexico arrived on July 22nd, this time with a delegation of more than fifty. The chief of the delegation presented himself as Captain Tuerto. This Indian was blind in one eye and the word Tuerto translates in Spanish as "blind in one eye."

As they had done each of the last five years the delegation requested baptism and missionaries to return to their land. This time, however, there was great interest in their request. When the Indians again recounted the Lady in Blue they were taken into the convent to view a

portrait of a renowned nun from the Franciscan Order and asked if this was the woman. The Jumanos shook their heads, saying the lady was dressed the same but their teacher was younger and more beautiful.

The emissary, Father Perea, was now excited to see more of these Indians and decided to make a trip back to the Jumano's homeland with two other priests and three soldiers. One of the priests was Fray Juan De Salas, who spoke the Jumano language.

Again, unknown to the Spanish priests, a great multitude of Indians were now moving northward from their homelands at the urging of the Lady In Blue. They moved toward the delegation coming from the west and were making religious preparations for the gathering. The Lady In Blue gave them guidance in building an altar for the masses and large crosses for the event. From the expedition's description of travel, the chosen meeting place was probably a location between Lubbock and Amarillo, now known as Caprock Canyon State Park. This area was well known by the Indians as a place with abundant wildlife, water, and protection.



Caprock State Park

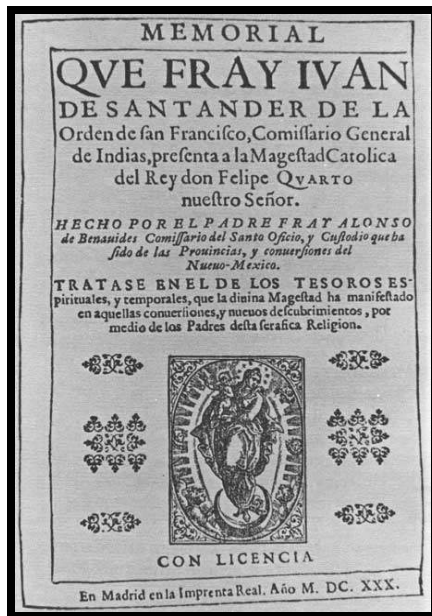
When the Santa Fe expedition arrived at the location they gazed upon a procession of 10,000 Indians coming out to meet them being led by Indians carrying two large wooden crosses. Altars were built, covered by an arbor of branches and flowers. To the priest's amazement, the Indians came up to genuflect and kiss their crucifixes. The priests were truly stunned.

The Franciscan expedition remained with the Indians for a number of weeks. They gave mass twice each day, always with maximum attendance. They met with more emissaries of other Indian tribes coming to visit, all of them saying they were sent by the Lady in Blue. Finally, realizing the size and scope of this land of new disciples – estimated to be around 60,000 - they decided they must return to New Mexico for more supplies, to develop a plan to send missionaries, and to report their findings back to the Church and the King of Spain.

On the last day they called the Indians together for a final mass. But unexpectedly the Indians began bringing forth their sick to be healed. The priests were caught by surprise, but they began to preach from the Gospel of Luke about how Jesus healed the sick and began passing among the masses making the sign of the cross over the sick. To their amazement the sick were, in fact, being healed. Father Salas reported that, “more than two hundred ...were cured in this manner.”

When the expedition returned to New Mexico they retold their glorious stories to Father Benavides. Benavides carried his report personally back to the Archbishop who was so impressed he ordered him to return to Madrid to report directly to the King of Spain. The one thing he did not know yet, though, was the identity of the Lady in Blue.

His report, entitled ‘Memorial of 1630,’ became one of the most important New World documents, describing some of the most incredible spiritual events of the Western World. A copy of this report is now held in the Library of Congress.



Memorial of 1630

This is not the end of the story though. Father Benavides still needed to find the Lady in Blue. After delivering his report to the King of Spain he turned his attention to seeking her out. From his discussion with Mary of Agreda, the Minister General knew exactly who the Lady in Blue was and directed Father Benavides to her convent with instructions for her to tell him everything and answer all his questions. He visited her in 1631 and began a detailed inquiry of her experiences to compare to his priest's experiences. She described the Indians in unbelievable detail – their tattoos, clothing, and customs. She told him she especially knew their leader, Capitan Tuerto, telling the priest how the Indian had lost his eye in battle. She gave the physical descriptions of the missionaries in New Mexico and described the route they had taken to reach the Indians. She explained how she had taught the Indians to build the crosses, altars, rosaries, and guided them in the religious traditions of the Church. When he left Benavides had no doubt of Mary's spiritual powers and the validity of her stories. He wrote a second report on his discoveries from these discussions, entitled 'Memorial of 1634.'



Portrait of Mary of Agreda at age 36

Although Mary's visits to the American Southwest ended in 1631 she continued to bless the Church with her visions and religious powers of insight. She penned one of the Church's most powerful writings, 'The Mystical City of God,' an 8-book narrative of her direct revelations from Mary, mother of Jesus.

Mary of Agreda died in 1665 and was placed in a glass coffin within the convent. Her body, though, refuses to naturally decay. After 345 years it is in the exact same condition as when she was laid to rest. This phenomenon has befuddled scientists. There have been two openings of the casket and scientific examinations of her body – one in 1909 and one in 1989. The 1989 examination included photographic and scientific samples before resealing the casket. Both examinations showed no deterioration at all.



The casket of Mary of Agreda

Mary of Agreda was bestowed the title of “Venerable” by the Church, a person who has been posthumously declared "heroic in virtue" during the investigation and a process leading to canonization as a saint. There is an ongoing movement around the world to bring her to full sainthood.



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