

The Jumano Picture Story of 'The Lady in Blue' at Meyers Spring, Texas

West Texas Archeological Society, Tom Ashmore

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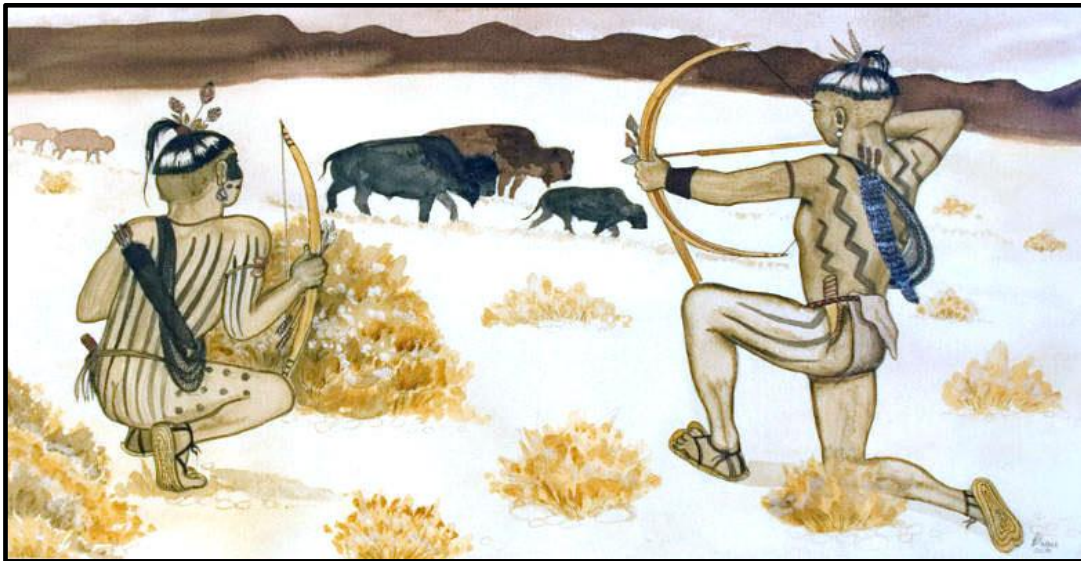
Introduction

The Meyers Spring pictograph wall is unlike any other found in the Lower Pecos Region of Texas—a region renowned for its numerous ancient shelters and pictographs. Although the limestone wall next to the spring-fed creek was painted on for probably thousands of years, the ancient drawings gave way to a more recent historic era, as travelers began creating their stories on stone. One 20-foot section of wall appears to be dedicated as a memorial to a story of Indians and their Christianity. The section has been puzzled over for decades by many groups of visiting rock art enthusiasts. It has an obvious iconization of Indians and Christianity, but which group of Indians is represented, and what is the association? The discussions have been ongoing for years with no resolution or consensus. When we brought in the Lipan Apache Band of Texas representatives, they did not see any association with them or the other Apache tribal groups, who are now mainly in New Mexico.

In May 2025, we invited Jumano member Bill Martinez Acosta to view the pictographs. His recognition was immediate. This is the story of the Jumano Indians in the early 1600s, and their journey to bring Franciscan priests into Texas to continue the Jumano education in the teachings of Jesus Christ, a mission initiated years earlier by the 'Lady in Blue'.

The Texas Jumano Indians Of The 1600s

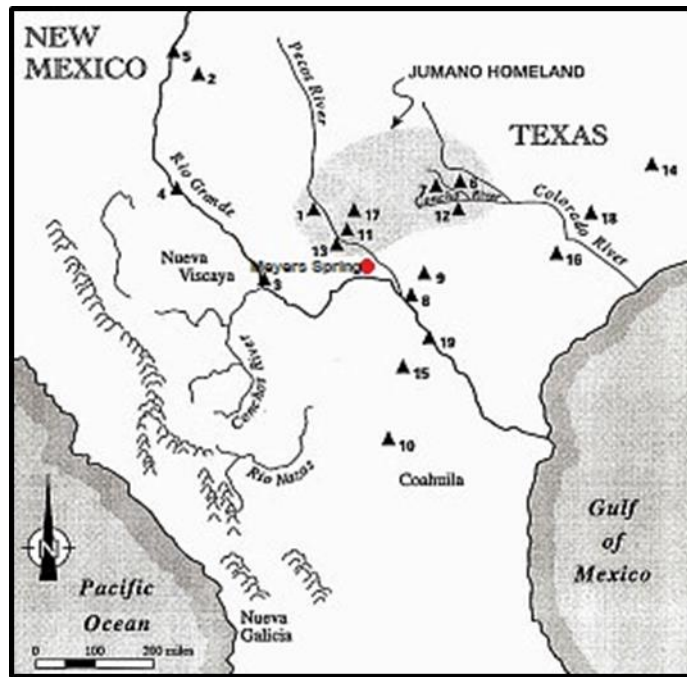
The Jumano were a fair-skinned Indian tribe with a pleasant disposition. The men cut their hair short in a bowl-like shape, with a loop of hair sticking up from the middle of their head, and the women wore their hair long. They preferred to tattoo their bodies with decorations, making them very distinctive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



(courtesy of Texas Beyond History)

By the early 1600s, the total Jumano territory extended from below the Rio Grande River, south of the current location of Del Rio, and westward to the region beyond the Big Bend, Texas. Their northern border was generally to the north of the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers, and on the west to the Pecos River. Meyers Spring is situated right in the center of the entire known Jumano territory.

In 1623, although still a migratory people, many of the Jumano Indians camped along the Concho River and its tributaries. The clear, spring-fed creeks provided an abundance of fish and mollusks, and the area was home to deer and other wildlife. 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 their bounty, the Concho River had become the heart of the Jumano nation. Due to their central location, they served as traders with other Indian nations, extending from what is now known as New Mexico to the west, south into Mexico, east to Louisiana and the coast, and north to the Texas Panhandle area. They traded their pecans, pearls from the Concho River, buffalo skins, and their powerful bows, which were used to take down the buffalo.



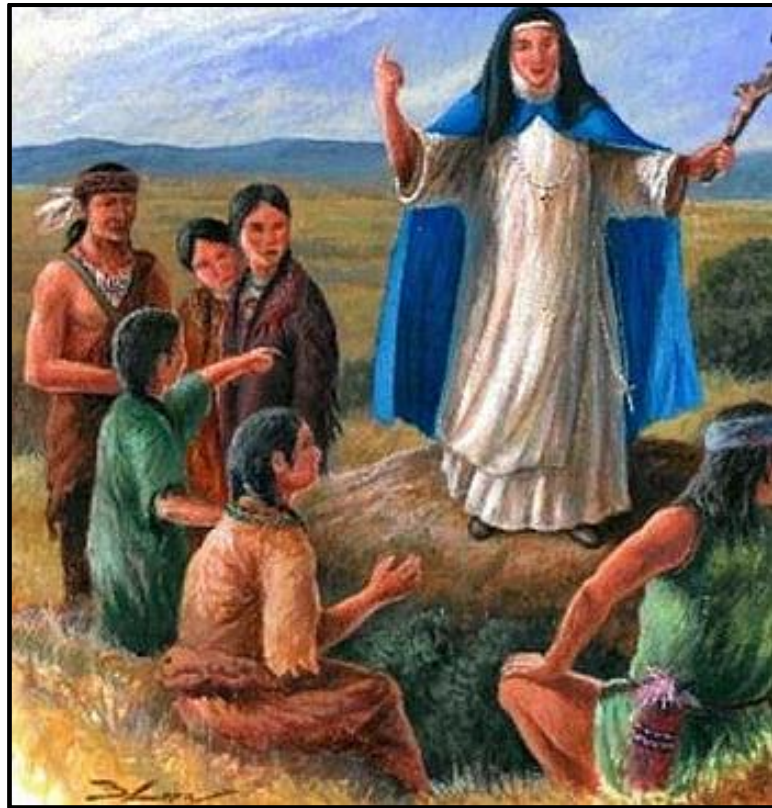
A map of the original homeland of the Jumano Indians based on early encounters with Spanish explorers. The Meyers Spring location is shown in red. (courtesy Texas Beyond History)

The Jumano Indians and ‘The Lady in Blue’

By 1623, the Spanish had established themselves in New Mexico, with a Franciscan mission in Isleta, 15 miles south of Albuquerque. This was Mission San Agustín. Imagine the surprise of Fray Juan de Salas when a delegation of twelve Jumano Indians arrived 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 the missionaries had never traveled to their lands? They told him they had learned about Jesus Christ from the “white-skinned lady in blue” who visited 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 for the next five years, making the same request, and were denied each time.

What the Franciscan priest did not know at the time was that three years earlier in Agreda, Spain, an 18-year-old nun of the Order of the Immaculate Conception, also known as Franciscan Conceptionists, named María Coronel y de Arana had begun reporting mystic raptures during her meditations. She reported having spiritual journeys to faraway lands, where she met Indigenous people and shared the Word of Christ with them. She reported to her spiritual advisor and her convent sisters that she made as many as four monthly trips and could converse in their language. In her spiritual travels, she guided the Indians in building crosses and places of worship, and taught

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 Isleta, 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 light blue, described by the Jumano as the color of the sky.



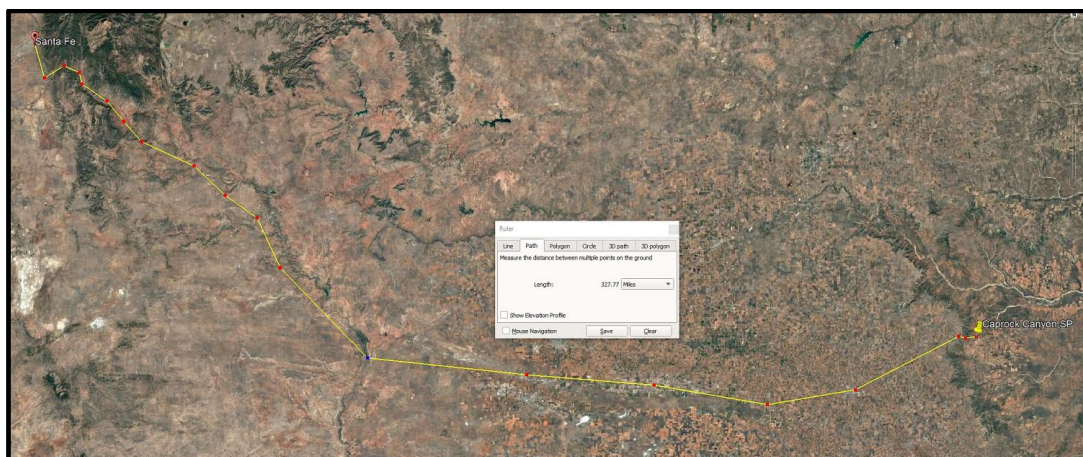
(courtesy of timefordisclosure.com)

Maria's description of her travels was 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 verify her descriptions and events. The archbishop, in turn, sent an inquiry to Father Alonso de 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 a 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.

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. Father Perea, the emissary, was excited to see more of these Indians and decided to return 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 from the west and were preparing religiously for the gathering. The 'Lady in Blue' provided guidance in building an altar for the masses and large crosses for the event. When the expedition arrived at the location, they gazed upon a procession of Indians coming out to meet them, being led by Indians carrying two large wooden crosses. The camping area was estimated to contain 10,000 Indians. 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 meeting place was documented to be about 325 miles (112 leagues) south and then east of Santa Fe. This location was chosen not only for this meeting, but it was also a required move to new hunting grounds for the summer months, as the area of the Concho River was reportedly suffering from a major drought, loss of animal resources and clean water. The current entrance to Caprock Canyon State Park is 328 miles, using the best possible route from Santa Fe. The site offers a large camping area of around 900 acres, with good access to a nearby creek. This area has been a site of buffalo presence since ancient times. The creek has a previously excavated buffalo butchering site. A 2022 – 2025 archeological excavation, of a major buffalo jump site (Nighthawk) headed by Dr. Gus Costa, resulted in bone radio carbon dates from multiple kill events that fit well into the period of the Jumano occupation of Texas (1161, 1263, 1402, 1541 A.D.)





Entrance to Caprock Canyon State Park

The Franciscan expedition remained with the Indians for several weeks. They gave mass twice each day, always with maximum attendance. They met with more emissaries of other Indian tribes coming to visit, all 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, lame, and blind to be healed. The priests were caught off guard, but they began to preach from the Gospel of Luke about how Jesus healed the sick and began to pass among the masses, making the sign of the cross over the sick. To their amazement, all were healed. Father Salas reported that, “more than two hundred ...were cured in this manner.”

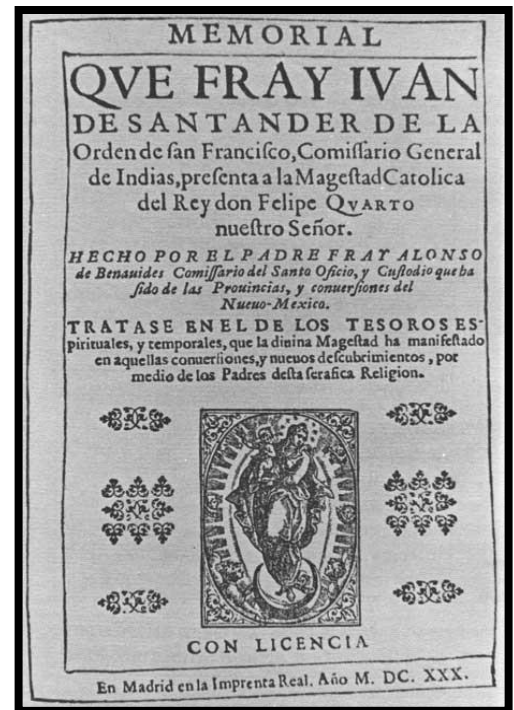


When the expedition returned to New Mexico, they retold their glorious stories to Father Benavides.

Benavides personally carried his report 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, "Memorial of 1630," became one of the most important New World documents, describing some of the most incredible spiritual events in 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 precisely 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 with his priest's experiences. She described the Indians' tattoos, clothing, and customs in unbelievable detail. 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 crosses, altars, and rosaries, and guided them in the Church's religious traditions. 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.'

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 the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus. She was carefully examined twice by the Inquisition in the years 1635 and 1650, and they could find no evidence to discredit her claims or writings.

Maria of Agreda, at the age of 63, died on May 24, 1665, and was placed in a glass coffin within the convent. Her body, though, refuses to decay naturally. After 360 years, it is in the 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 the casket was resealed. Both examinations showed no deterioration at all. Maria of Agreda was bestowed the title of "Venerable" by the Church, a posthumous declaration of "heroic in virtue" during the investigation.



The casket of Maria of Agreda

The Meyers Spring Pictograph Story

A 20-foot section of the Meyers Spring Wall displays a series of pictographs that tell the story of the 1629 meeting of the Jumano Indians and the Franciscan Friars in north Texas. Bill Martinez Acosta, an enrolled member of the Jumano Nation and a well-known Jumano spiritual and cultural leader, interpreted the story on the wall.



Bill Martinez Acosta at Meyers Spring Pictograph Wall

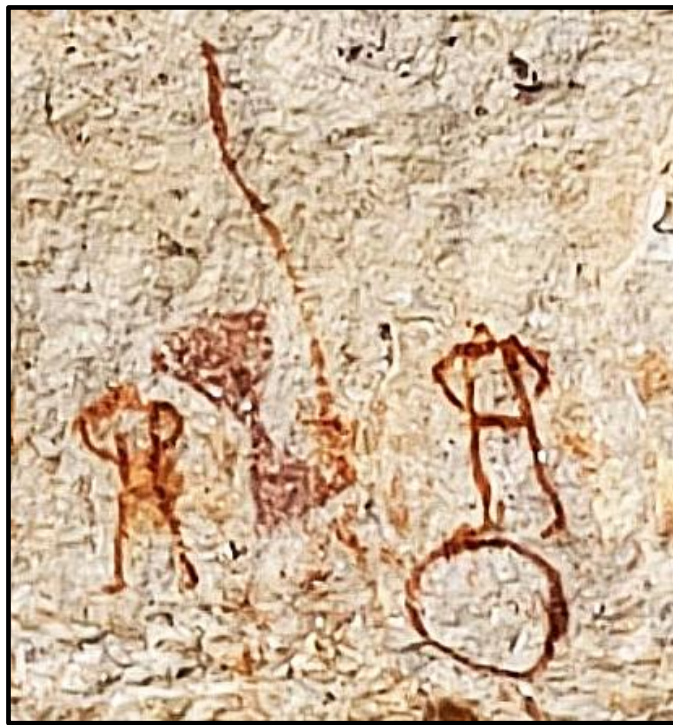


Jumano Story Pictographs



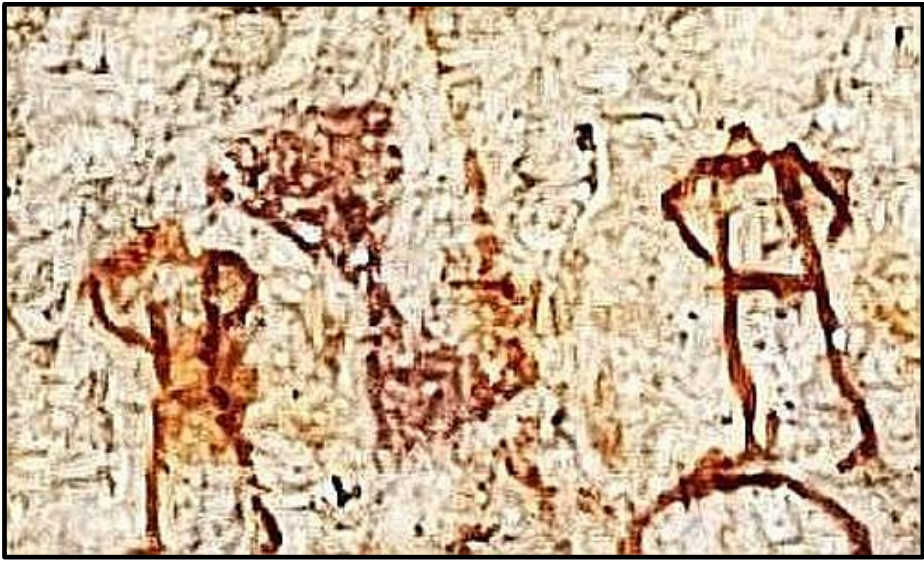
The stick figures represent the procession of the Jumano Nation leaders who went to meet the Franciscan friars. The two figures at each of the two crosses might be considered Indian chiefs, but in the Jumano culture, they are referred to as ward captains. Behind them, the figures with the halo-like ring above their heads are the spiritual leaders. The figures following in the procession are regional chiefs or village leaders.

Between the crosses are two figures that look much different than the stick figures of the procession. These are probably depicting two of the soldiers sent with the friars. Between the soldier-like figures is a swerving line coming down the wall. This likely represents the travel route leading to the meeting place. At the bottom of that line is a very small stick figure, supporting the supposition that this represents a route of travel. The meeting place may be the circle, drawn below the end of the route-of-expedition line.

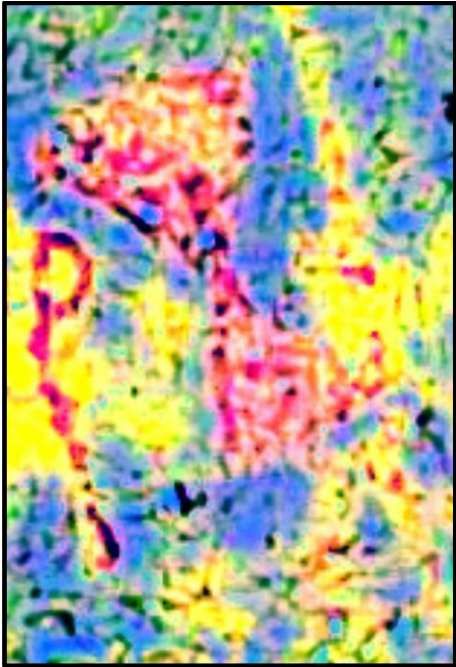


Mapped Travel Route and Meeting Location

The hourglass-like depiction, we believe, is the Jumano depiction of the ‘Lady in Blue,’ shown in spirit form, who was said to guide the procession of chiefs to meet the friar’s expedition and lead them to the meeting place. Zooming in on the depiction gives a closer look at this interpretation. It appears the artist was trying to show a spirit image with light emanating outward, which comes out clearly in a DStretch rendering. The head is darkened on top, as if to show the nun’s black veil, and white below, showing the nun’s guimpe.



‘Lady in Blue’ Spirit Image



DStretch Version

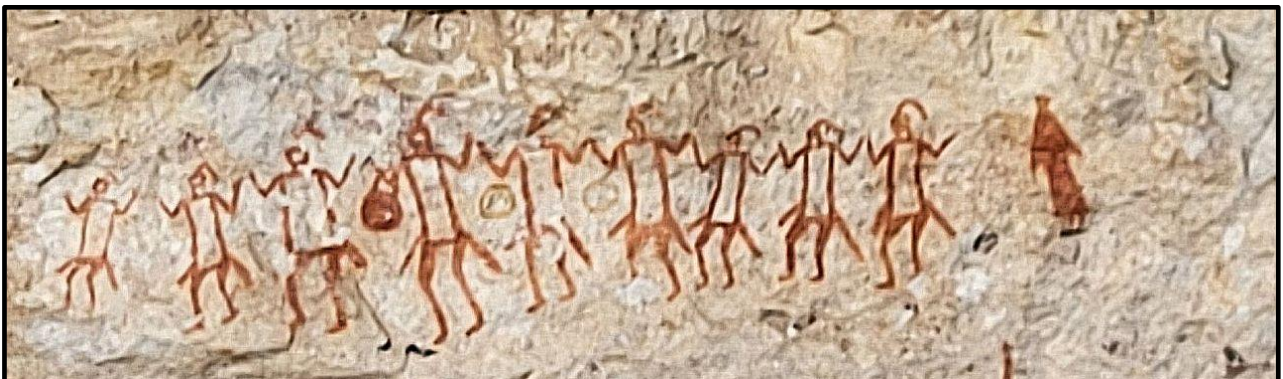


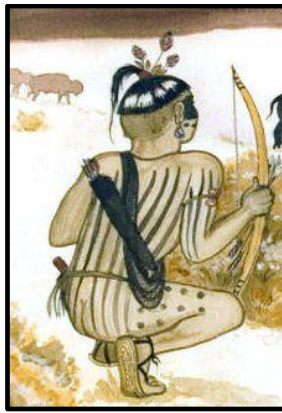
After the processions met the incoming expedition, they returned to an area prepared for the mass and set up their crosses. This is where they put them on “pedestals.” Those pedestals were tripods, and those tripods are depicted on the wall. On the wall above them is the priest in his liturgical vestments giving Mass. This is depicted using lines coming out of the mouth, recognized in rock art by Carolyn Boyd and given the term ‘Speech Breath.’ (Boyd and Busby) Red and white were the primary colors of the vestments during the 17th-century mission era.



17th Century mission-era Liturgical Vestments <https://www.scu.edu/desaiisset/collections/history/vestments/>

The final, and most famous portion of the pictograph story, is the Indian dancers. This is the time of celebration after the mass healing that stunned the friars themselves. In this pictograph, the hand drums, which the Jumano still carry in celebration to this day, are depicted. Next to them is the friar watching in his traditional robes. The identifiable looped hairstyle is also clearly included in the image.



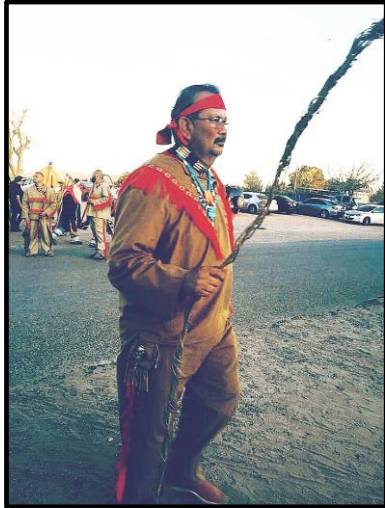


Depiction of a Jumano Indian with a hair loop, as seen in pictograph

After this, the priests were eager to return to the mission in Isleta Pueblo to report the miraculous events they had experienced. A second expedition was quickly planned, but only two priests could be spared when the time came. Frays Pedro de Ortega and Ascension de Zarate volunteered to trek to the Jumano homeland. With Jumano Indians as guides, they reported traveling “two hundred leagues [600 miles] southeast of Santa Fe, to a stream called the Nueces.” The Nueces they mentioned was not the current Texas Nueces River, but the Concho River, in the general vicinity of what is now San Angelo, Texas. The Spanish word Nueces means “nuts.” This name was given due to the abundance of Pecan trees on the river. The Jumano were spread along all the tributary streams and the Concho River. Soon after arriving, Fray Zarate returned, likely due to health reasons, but Fray Ortega stayed with the Jumano Indians for six months, catechizing and baptizing them. He died there of unknown causes. With this, the Christianization of the Jumano once again came to a halt. Mary of Agreda reported her spiritual journeys to the Southwest ceased when the missionaries began their work with the Jumanos.

Jumano & Puebloan People Today

The Indigenous Puebloan people today continue to follow the teachings of the ‘Lady in Blue’. We can still see the same “El Procession,” including the crosses and drums, depicted on the wall at Meyers Spring.



Bill Martinez Acosta, Jumano and a member of Tortugas Pueblo, which are Tigua, Piro, and Manso peoples



(photos courtesy of Bill Martinez Acosta)

Conclusion

This is the first known depiction of the ‘Lady in Blue’ story, as memorialized by the Jumano people themselves, making it one of the most important pictographs in both Texas and religious history. Although it has been on the wall and viewed by visitors for hundreds of years, this is the first identification of the pictorial story of a miraculous event, well documented in Spanish and Vatican archives. The Vatican, which investigated Sister Maria of Agreda through the Inquisition, announced that her abilities and ventures into the “New Spain” of the Americas to teach the Jumano people about Christ were genuine and authentic.



Monastery of the Order of Immaculate Conception



Order of the Immaculate Conception (<https://mariadeagreda.org/en/our-monastery>)

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Appendix: *Timeline of Lady In Blue – Jumano Events*

1620 – 1623: Bilocation to Jumano homeland to educate on the teachings of Christ

(She estimated around 500 visits)

1624–1628: Continues bilocation and education, but encourages Jumano delegations to travel to Isleta Pueblo to request that friars be sent to continue their education. Each year the delegation is denied.

Early June 1629: Annual Jumano delegation, increased to 50, departs for Isleta Pueblo, NM

July 3, 1629: Father Esteban Perea arrives with 30 additional friars to relieve Father Benavides.

(They carried a letter from the King of Spain asking that the friars try to verify a story about a nun in Spain who claimed to be visiting the territories of the New World in some strange, supernatural manner.)

July 22, 1629: The Jumano delegation, increased to 50, arrives at Isleta.

July 25, 1629 (or thereabouts) 1629: Fathers Perea, Salas, and Diego Lopes departed with the Delegation of 50 and 3 soldiers.

August 4, 1629: The Second Jumano delegation that had been sent to inform the first of the change of camp to the northern buffalo hunting grounds meets Spanish priests heading east.
(The second delegation was told where they would meet by Lady in Blue)

August 10, 1629 (approximate): The delegations and priests arrive at the new hunting camp where an estimated 10,000 Jumano were waiting.

(Based on time, distance, camping area, water, and buffalo known hunting region, this destination was most likely what is now Caprock Canyon State Park.)

August 30, 1629 (approximate): Friars begin return trip to Isleta to report their findings and compose a letter to the King of Spain.

August 1, 1630: Father Benavides arrives in Spain to give his report.

(The report becomes The Memorial of 1630, and now resides in the Vatican.)

1631: Sor Maria ends her bilocation visits to the American Southwest

June 1632: Fray Pedro de Ortega and Fray Asención de Zárate (with Fray Juan de Salas possibly directing or joining), departed from New Mexico for the Jumano homeland.

July 1632: Arrived in the area of the Concho River, probably at the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers.

(Stayed for six months before returning in December 1632 due to remoteness and supply issues.)