

# Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns

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## *Introduction*

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### *The Other Voice: Atlantic Nuns*

In the early eighteenth century as fleets of European ships navigated the currents of the Atlantic, five Capuchin nuns boarded a Spanish vessel at the Port of Cadiz. They were about to embark on a remarkable journey that would literally take them across two continents and an ocean in between. This was a watershed moment for Europe: the Spanish War of Succession (1701–14) was still ongoing and the decaying Spanish Empire was fast yielding to more powerful nations such as Britain and Holland.<sup>1</sup> In these turbulent times, an amazing voice emerged from a woman who documented the compelling story of the foundation of a new convent in Lima, Peru.

María Rosa, the mother abbess of the future Capuchin convent in Peru, wrote a unique and fascinating manuscript, originally titled, “Account of the Journey of Five Capuchin Nuns.” It was later polished and edited by another nun, Josepha Victoria, in 1722.<sup>2</sup> María Rosa held many things in common with other religious early modern European writers: she was brought up under the strict regulations of a Post-Tridentine doctrine and, until her journey, she had lived her life within the cloistered walls of a convent. What makes this document unique is that the sisters’ lives were turned upside-down when they accepted the challenge of leaving Madrid and traveling to the New World to establish a convent in Peru. Their legacy is a riveting travel narrative of adventure on the high seas, pirates, violent storms, and the crossing of the Andes. María Rosa’s account documents this experience and paints the sights and sounds of their travels through colorful brushstrokes. She enriches our perceptions of the Atlantic world by adding the depth and specificity of her personal experience. Hers is a remarkable text because it is one of the few travel accounts written by a woman for other women of this time period. It alters the traditional perspective that only men traveled and wrote eyewitness accounts of the Iberian Atlantic. Moreover, it attests to the direct

1. Holland, along with parts of Belgium and France, was originally known as Flanders.

2. The narrative is written primarily in the first person from the mother abbess’s perspective, but there are several instances when Josepha Victoria interjects her own observations. These are usually short asides that mention whether or not a certain person had since passed away or had changed rank.

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participation of early modern women in the expansion of the Atlantic world. Up until now María Rosa's voice has been relegated to the outermost margins of history. Thanks to this series, the English translation of her account is now accessible to scholars, students, and all those interested in women's history.

### *Women's Role in the Atlantic World*

The latest studies on gender and religion are providing a nuanced view of how early modern Spanish and colonial women negotiated the minefield of a patriarchal and misogynist society.<sup>3</sup> This body of scholarship suggests that women, including nuns, learned to work within the church-driven gender codes that governed their behavior. Those gender codes were put in place at the last session of the Council of Trent, December 3, 1563.<sup>4</sup> The Council mandated the strict enclosure of nuns within cloistered walls. An exception was made, however, for the founding of new convents.<sup>5</sup> The Capuchin nuns of Madrid

3. See Kathryn Burns, *Colonial Habits: Convents and the Spiritual Economy of Cuzco, Peru* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Stephanie L. Kirk, *Convent Life in Colonial Mexico: A Tale of Two Communities* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Jacqueline Holler, *Escogidas Plantas: Nuns and Beatas in Mexico City, 1531–1601* (<http://www.gutenberg-e.org>, 2002); Nora Jaffary, *False Mystics: Deviant Orthodoxy in Colonial Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Elizabeth A. Leffeldt, *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain: The Permeable Cloister* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Joan Cameron Bristol, *Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007); Allyson Poska, *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain: The Peasants of Galicia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bianca Premo, *Children of the Father King: Youth, Authority & Legal Minority in Colonial Lima* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Kimberly Guaderman, *Women's Lives in Colonial Quito: Gender, Law and Economy in Spanish America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Daniella Kostroun and Lisa Vollendorf, eds. *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World* (University of Toronto Press, forthcoming).

4. *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. Rev. H. J. Schroeder (London and St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1941, 1960), 220–21 [Twenty-fifth session, December 3–4, 1563, chapter 5].

5. Kostroun and Vollendorf affirm that the negative and isolating character of enclosure in cloistered convents has been overstated. They have written: "The mandate to enclosure for religious women cut some religious communities off from their livelihoods, yet opened up opportunities for engagement with education and reform, as seen in the influential case of Teresa of Avila's Discalced Carmelites." Introduction to *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World*, 12. In reference to the Tridentine reforms Leffeldt opines: "By examining the intertwined issues of monastic discipline, opportunities for religious expression, and secular patronage, it is apparent that Spanish religious women and their supporters negoti-

were following church mandates when they selected five sisters who were willing to undertake the transatlantic venture in order to create a monastery in the New World. María Rosa, one of the five selected, took it upon herself to chronicle the daily events of their travels so that their future sisters in Lima (and back in Spain) could trace the footsteps of their pilgrimage. The five original founders and their posts were: Madre María Rosa (abbess), Madre María Estefanía (vicarress), Madre María Gertrudis (turn keeper [*tornera*]), Madre María Bernarda (novice mistress) and the Madre Josepha Victoria (council member [*conciliaria*]).

“Account of the Journey” shows that the voyage and subsequent foundation of their new convent was also in accordance with the Spanish Crown’s desire to imprint Spanish Catholicism onto Peruvian culture.<sup>6</sup> The use of missionaries to build empire had begun as early as the first voyages of Columbus and would continue until independence.<sup>7</sup> What makes this manuscript special is that it enables us to see, through María Rosa’s narrative lens, that women played an active role in the colonial enterprise. She was among the first women to document her experiences as a woman of the church traveling from Spain to the New World.

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ated a modified application of the reforms.” *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, 11. Also see Ulrike Strasser for a discussion of nun’s agency in Catholic Bavaria. She has written: “Nuns still were among the most powerful and influential women of the early modern state; because of the Counter Reformation’s preoccupation with chastity and the Virgin Mary, some rose to greater prominence than they previously enjoyed.” *State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 3.

6. For a general overview on missionaries in Peru see Juan Carlos Estenssoro Fuchs, *Del paganismo a la santidad: La incorporación de los indios del Perú al Catolicismo*, trans. Gabriela Ramos (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2003), 36–46. See also Rubén Vargas Ugarte’s *Historia de la iglesia en el Perú (1570–1640)* (Burgos: Imprenta de Aldecoa, 1959), II.225–68. See Holler for a similar discussion of the role of religious women in Mexico City. She considers them “as participants in and instruments of a conscious process of social transformation.” *Escogidas Plantas*, 5.

7. According to Amy Turner Bushnell and Jack P. Greene, “The European encounter with the Americas inaugurated by the Columbian voyages provided the first step in the reconstructions of the Atlantic—and, more particularly, the American world. Over the next 350 years, Europeans, operating under the aegis or the blessing of the national politics taking shape on the northeastern fringe of the Atlantic Ocean, engaged in a plethora of efforts to bring the vast spaces and numerous people of the Americas under their hegemony.” Introduction to *Negotiated Empire: Centers and Peripheries in the Americas, 1500–1820*, ed. Christine Daniels and Michael V. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1.

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“Account of the Journey” was not a complete break from similar works produced by their male counterparts or from the constraints of patriarchal society. On the contrary, María Rosa (through later editing by Josepha Victoria) created a hybrid of several different genres accessible to her at the time. It took three years for this small group of nuns to navigate the Atlantic to their final destination of Peru. During the two years they were delayed on the Iberian Peninsula, they were very likely exposed to ideas and even books pertaining to the New World. Upon close examination, we can see a tapestry of influences in this manuscript, including the style of foundation narratives of new convents, travel writing by women (Saint Teresa of Avila), Post-Tridentine doctrine, and the traditional chronicles of the New World (especially that of José de Acosta).

María Rosa's writing style is lively and multilayered. She forces us to rethink many of our assumptions about early modern religious women, especially that of the nun isolated from the outside world. What's more, her text takes account of the politically complex landscape of the Atlantic world and is a salient example of women's roles in that world. For example, throughout her writing we see how these nuns were treated with reverence and high regard. Whenever they arrived in a large city, such as Santiago or Lima, the local population would come out in droves just to catch a glimpse of the nuns from Spain. The sophistication of her account is impressive, particularly since María Rosa, like other religious women of her time, had access only to informal mechanisms of education.

#### *María Rosa and the Capuchin Order*

We know little about María Rosa, other than what is found in her “Account of the Journey.” She was born in Madrid on January 14, 1660. Her parents were Joseph de León y Ayala (from Seville) and Estefanía Muñoz (from Villa de Herrera de Guadalupe). Her given name was Josefa de León y Ayala, but, as was customary, she changed it to María Rosa upon becoming a nun. She entered the Capuchin convent of Madrid at the age of seventeen in 1677. After she was appointed the first mother abbess of the new convent in Peru, she left Spain in 1712 with the four other founding mothers, none of whom was ever to return to her homeland. A month before her death on August 14, 1716, she stepped down from this position and her cofounder María Gertrudis

was elected abbess. María Rosa died at the age of fifty-six.<sup>8</sup>

María Rosa and her companions came from a long line of Capuchin women who had taken to the road to found new convents. Moreover, their foremothers enrich our understanding of these brave women who crossed the Atlantic. A woman named María Lorenza Llonc founded the original order in the early sixteenth century in Naples, Italy. She was from Catalonia, Spain, but had traveled in 1506 with her husband to Italy with the court of Ferdinand “The Catholic.” After his death she donned the garb of a third order Franciscan. She was forty-seven at the time. The convent she founded in 1535 in Naples (Monasterio de Jerusalén) was first part of the Order of Saint Clare but later became part of the Capuchins because the nuns yearned to follow a more austere lifestyle and wanted novices to be able to take their vows without a dowry.<sup>9</sup>

The first Capuchin convent outside Italy was the Monasterio de Jesús María in Granada, Spain, founded in 1597 by Lucía de Ureña. At the age of eighteen, she had dressed in the garb of a third order Franciscan and in 1587 traveled by foot all the way to Rome. She obtained an interview with the Franciscan Pope Sixtus V (1585–90), who granted permission for the new order in southern Spain. After the Capuchins established roots in Granada, they began to expand throughout Spain, France, and Portugal. The convent in Madrid, which later was to send the five nuns to Peru, was established in 1618.<sup>10</sup>

8. One of the few references to María Rosa is an entry on her by José Antonio Alvarez de Baena in *Hijos de Madrid, Ilustres en Santidad, Dignidades, Armas, Ciencias y Artes* (Madrid: Cano, 1791), IV.312–14. According to that source there was a *vida* (spiritual autobiography) written about María Rosa and it was sent to her sister Doña Teresa de Leon in Spain. I searched several archives in Spain and was unable to locate this document. See also Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Relaciones de viajes (Siglo XVI, XVII y XVIII)* (Lima: Biblioteca Histórica Peruana, 1947), viii–xii. Vargas Ugarte cites María Rosa's parents' names as José de Ayala and Estefanía de Castro y Rivadeneyra. He mentions that María Gertrudis was the author of the *vida* of María Rosa; however, he does not mention the whereabouts of this document or the source of his information. The only other information about María Rosa and her founding sisters (two of whom became future abbesses at the convent in Lima) is in several letters housed in the Archive of the Indies in Seville. These letters were written after their trip and were addressed to the new Bourbon king of Spain, Philip V, beseeching him to grant their father confessor, Joseph Fausto Gallegos, an official post (with a pension) at their convent or within the bishopric of Lima. See Madre María Rosa, abadesa a Su Majestad, *Cartas y expedientes: personas eclesiásticas (1704–15)*, Signatura, Lima, 536, Archive of the Indies.

9. For a summary of the origins of the Capuchin order, see Lázaro Iriarte, *Las capuchinas: Pasado y presente* (Seville: El Adalid Seráfico, 1996), 17–24.

10. *Ibid.*, 49–57.

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The impetus for the new convent in Peru came from the efforts of a group of religious lay women, who were living together in a *beaterio* (an informal spiritual community), to become Capuchin nuns.<sup>11</sup> This community in Lima was originally formed as a *beaterio* by an indigenous man, Nicolás de Ayllón<sup>12</sup> (later known as Nicolás de Dios) and his wife, María Jacinta—a *mestiza* woman—in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Together they began to take in orphaned girls from Lima, and they eventually converted their home into an informal house for third order Franciscans. After her husband's death, María Jacinta became the mother superior of the *beaterio*. The *beatas* dreamed of converting their house into a convent.<sup>13</sup> This was in their best interest because their situation as religious lay women was precarious at best. For the most part, *beatas* were viewed with suspicion by the Catholic Church since they lived just beyond the church's control.<sup>14</sup> In 1685 the pious laywomen, with the help of various Jesuit priests, began the lengthy process of establishing a convent. During these early years, they directed all of their correspondence to the ail-

11. In "Account of the Journey," María Rosa always refers to the future novices as *colegialas* (schoolgirls) and to the lay community as the *colegio* (school); she never uses the term *beaterio*. Other sources, however, use only the term *beaterio* to describe this community of laywomen. Vargas Ugarte's edition of the account includes another document that even has *beaterio* in its title: "The Account of the Origin and Foundation of the *Beaterio* Jesus, Mary and Joseph and the Life and Virtues of Madre María Jacinta de la Santísima Trinidad, the Founder." See *Relaciones de viajes (Siglo XVI, XVII y XVIII)*, 211–55; see also Manuel de Mendiburu's *Diccionario Histórico Biográfico del Perú Tomo I* (Lima: Solis, 1874), I.37.

12. Nicolás de Ayllón (1632–77) was viewed as a saint by the people of Lima. For biographical information and details on his canonization, see Estensoro Fuchs, *Del paganismo a la santidad*, 468–92. See also Bernardo Sartolo, *Vida admirable y muerte prodigiosa de Nicolás de Ayllon y con renombre más glorioso Nicolás de Dios, Natural de Chiclayo en las Indias del Perú* (Madrid: García Infancon, 1684). According to Enrique Fernández García, *Perú Cristiano* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú Fondo Editorial, 2000), 280 and n28, Nicolás de Ayllon also founded, with the help of the Jesuit José de Buendía, the Escuela de Cristo in the church San Diego.

13. For a general discussion of *beatas* and *beaterios*, see Francisca de los Apóstoles, *The Inquisition of Francisca: A Sixteenth-Century Visionary on Trial*, ed. and trans. Gillian Ahlgren. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1–11. For a discussion of *colegios*, see Josefina Muriel, *La sociedad novohispana y sus colegios de niñas: Fundaciones de los siglos XVII y XVIII* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2004), 25–32.

14. For an astute assessment of *beatas* in colonial Peru, see Stacey Schlau, "Angela Carranza: El género sexual, la comercialización religiosa y la subversión de la jerarquía eclesiástica en el Perú colonial," in *Nictimene...sacrílega: Estudios coloniales en homenaje a Georgina Sabat-Rivers*, ed. Mabel Moraña and Yolanda Martínez San-Miguel (Mexico: Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana, 2003), 114–16.

ing king of Spain, Charles II. By 1699 the *beatas* received permission by royal decree (*cédula real*) to become a convent. The mother house of the Capuchin order in Madrid had been selected to send five nuns to found the new nunnery.<sup>15</sup>

Capuchin nuns were loosely affiliated with the friars of the same name (who, along with the Jesuits, often served as their confessors), but instead of mandates from the friars, their order was based directly on the Rule of Saint Clare of Assisi (1194–1253). The Italian saint had originally founded the order of the Poor Clares in Italy during the thirteenth century. Saint Clare was a contemporary of Saint Francis and was deeply inspired by his teachings. Her rule (the body of regulations that govern the conduct of its members) prescribed a lifestyle of austere poverty, strict enclosure, simplicity (no dowry or possessions), fasting, and an intense prayer schedule throughout the day and night. The nuns who followed the Rule of Saint Clare and other austere orders were known as *discalced* (barefoot) orders and were much stricter than the *calced* (shod) orders.

With the passage of time some of the convents founded by Saint Clare began to stray from the original teaching of poverty and austerity. By the early fifteenth century, several convents had relaxed their regulations to such an extent that they were considered *calced* orders. Young women who aspired to become nuns in a *calced* convent needed a dowry to be accepted and often brought great wealth to a convent. They enjoyed relative freedom in that they could have their own cell (sometimes several rooms), a kitchen, and even servants and slaves. It was possible for a woman to enter a *calced* convent without a dowry, but she would have to profess as a white-veiled nun, could not hold office, and usually had to work as part of the servant class. In France, Saint Colette (1381–1447) became particularly disenchanted with the Poor Clares and set out to reform the order. During her lifetime, she founded seventeen convents called the *Colettines* (a branch of the Poor Clares). In addition to the original Rule of Saint Clare, she wrote a new set of constitutions (the fundamental laws and principles that govern each individual convent) that received official support from the church. The Capuchins adopted a version of the *Colettine Constitutions* as their own. In “Account of the Journey,” the author, María Rosa, makes frequent reference to Saint Clare, but mentions Saint Colette only on one occasion. Obviously she views the

15. Several examples of this correspondence are in the Archive of the Indies, Signatura, Lima, 536.

former as the founding mother of her order. She is also quick to point out the lack of poverty and lax rule in certain Poor Clare convents, particularly those in Portugal.

Each Capuchin convent had the right to modify its own constitutions as long as it adhered to the basic tenets of poverty and austerity. For this reason, we can observe slightly different routines, hierarchy, and even dress, depending on the convent. Although the times could vary slightly, all Capuchins followed a very strict prayer schedule laid down in the Divine Office. The nuns would pray seven hours in a twenty-four hour day: a typical day would be marked by matins and lauds (considered as a single hour), prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, and compline.<sup>16</sup> In the account, María Rosa specifically mentions vespers (the evening service, said around 6:00 p.m. or sunset), compline (usually before bedtime), and matins (usually said at midnight).

In addition to the prayer schedule, most Capuchin nuns followed a very strict routine of fasting. This does not mean that they gave up food altogether but that they limited their food to one main meal a day and one light meal called a collation. For the most part they avoided meat and poultry. Exceptions could be made for illness or other extenuating circumstances, like the long journey to the New World. Some Capuchins practiced bodily penance, such as self-flagellation or the use of hair shirts. Yet, this seems to be more of an exception rather than the rule, and María Rosa never mentions any of these practices in her narrative.<sup>17</sup>

Their dress was simple and austere. The nuns wore a brown or gray habit made of coarse wool. They had only one change of under tunic made of sackcloth (a very scratchy material conducive to penance). María Rosa makes reference to their dress several times throughout the document. She is proud of their poverty and the fact that they have only one habit for the entire three-year journey. The nuns also wore a wimple, which covered their head and neck, and a veil as well, when they were approached by the secular population. María Rosa complains that during the hot weather they felt suffocated by the heavy veil.

Every Capuchin convent had its own form of self-governance.

16. See *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), s.v. "hours, canonical."

17. See Asunción Lavrin, *Brides of Christ* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 188–200.

The abbess was a senior member of the community democratically elected by the other nuns. The vicaress was second in command to the abbess. Each convent elected eight “discreets” to serve as council to the abbess. Another duty of the discreets was to accompany nuns to the grille or turn (*el torno*)—a revolving window in a cloistered convent used to pass messages from the outside world into the convent. Their job was to make sure that there was no “inappropriate” communication. Among other offices every convent had a novice mistress to instruct the novices (for at least a year) and turn keepers who were in charge of supervising the turn. On average a community would come together once a week for chapter meetings. They would discuss a variety of spiritual, administrative, and financial issues. Every convent also had its own chaplain (confessor), an additional chaplain, and oftentimes two lay brothers, but for the most part they did not interfere in the abbess’s control of her community.

Generally the young women who decided to become Capuchin nuns were from upper-class families or even nobility. This tradition carried over from the Middle Ages when convents in Spain were primarily for the daughters of the elite class. Despite the fact that the Capuchin order did not accept a dowry,<sup>18</sup> there was still only a limited number of nuns who could profess in any one convent (on average thirty-three) and this created competition. Aspiring nuns had to be legitimate daughters. Basic literacy was also most likely expected of novices. An elitist attitude toward class and race is quite evident in María Rosa’s narrative. During their five weeks in Lisbon, the narrator describes the Portuguese nuns as beautiful but the servants as “dark skinned and ugly” (90v). She also mentions that the nuns were daughters of nobility. Many of these prerequisites carried over into the New World, and the convents became homes primarily for white women of Spanish ancestry (*criollas*).

Because of their austere lifestyle each Capuchin community was completely dependent on benefactors and alms. The nuns embraced poverty, but they had to be realistic and court donors. For example, María Rosa makes specific reference to each one of their patrons at the end of her account. Without their help a nunnery could not survive on its own.<sup>19</sup> Every convent would have a procurator out-

18. Although the Capuchins did not accept dowries, they did not turn down donations from nuns and their families. In María Rosa’s account she tells how an aspirant nun of the new convent in Lima made a very sizable donation of 15,000 pesos to complete the church.

19. For an analysis of convent patronage see Leffeldt’s chapter, “Bound Together in Com-

side the convent to manage their funds and serve as an alms collector (*síndico*). Some convents would supplement their meager income by producing small items to sell to the outside world such as sweets, needlework, or silk flowers.<sup>20</sup>

### *The Legacy of Women and Travel*

The legacy of the Capuchin nuns' itinerant foremothers is deeply woven into the fabric of "Account of the Journey." Spanish nuns form part of a long heritage of European women travelers who have taken to the road and the seas since biblical times. Before the Counter Reformation and the strict mandates to enclose nuns in convents, religious women had much more freedom to leave their hometowns and travel to distant lands. In the early Middle Ages, the main impetus for travel was to make a pilgrimage to holy sites around Europe (Rome and Santiago de Compostela were very popular) and even further afield to such distant lands as Egypt, Constantinople, and Jerusalem. As early as 385, Egeria, a Spanish abbess probably from Galicia, wrote an account of her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in Latin. Her account of the journey is the oldest known travel document written by a woman. It provides a fascinating description of the geography and rituals of the sites she visited along the way.<sup>21</sup>

Egeria's travels differed from those of later Spanish nuns because she was not limited to the strict rules of a cloistered convent. She was much freer to embark on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Her fascinating description of the trip proves that religious women were interested in documenting their journeys. She set a precedent for many future pilgrims. Other religious women documented their travels in the early Middle Ages. Among the most famous were

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munity," *Religious Women in Golden Age Spain*, 15–46. See also Alison Weber, "Saint Teresa's Problematic Patrons," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 29, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 357–79.

20. For more information on the Capuchin order, see *Saint Clare's Plan for Gospel Living: The Rule and Constitutions of the Capuchin Poor Clares* (Wilmington, DE: Poor Clares, 1989), 3–15; Jesús Mendoza Muñoz, *El convento de San José de Gracia de pobres monjas capuchinas de la Ciudad de Querétaro, un espacio para la pobreza y la contemplación femenina durante el virreinato* (Querétaro, Mexico: Cadereyta, 2005), 7–35; Luis Francisco Prieto del Río, *Crónica del monasterio de capuchinas* (Santiago, Chile: Imprenta de San José, 1911), ix–xii.

21. For further information on Egeria see Carolyn L. Connor, *Women of Byzantium* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 35.

Leoba, an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon nun who traveled to Germany; Saint Birgitta (1303–73) of Sweden who established the Brigittines in Italy; and Margery Kempe who, after visiting all of holy sites in Europe and Jerusalem, wrote her well-known work *The Book of Margery Kempe*, considered by some the first autobiography written in the English language.<sup>22</sup>

Spanish nuns also have their own history of travel, much of which occurred during the climate of repression spurred by the Counter Reformation. As mentioned earlier, the Council of Trent had mandated the strict enclosure of nuns to the cloister. But this did not quench religious women's desire to leave their convents. Although nuns could no longer embark on a religious pilgrimage like their European foremothers, many became caught up in the missionary zeal that spread throughout this period. According to Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, "The spirit of missions that fired so many men in Catholic Europe burned with equal flame in many women."<sup>23</sup>

The world-renowned Saint Teresa of Avila (1515–82) shared in this missionary enthusiasm. At the tender age of seven, Teresa conceived a fervent desire, shared with many pious Catholics, to convert the heathen peoples of the world and to die a martyr. She and her brother Rodrigo even tried to run away from their hometown of Avila to convert the Moors. Her dream to die a martyr in a foreign land was never fulfilled, but she later focused her missionary fervor on reforming the Carmelite order. At the age of fifty-two she began numerous arduous travels around Spain on mules and in primitive oxcarts to establish and visit seventeen new convents.<sup>24</sup> She wrote countless letters documenting these foundations. Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau have written: "Saint Teresa of Avila's impact on the lives and writing of Hispanic nuns can scarcely be overestimated."<sup>25</sup> Regardless of the fact

22. For information on Leoba, see Catherine Wybourne, "Seafarers and Stay-At-Homes: Anglo-Saxon Nuns and Mission," *The Downside Review* 114, no. 397 (1996): 247–48. For information on Saint Birgitta see *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. For further information on Margery Kempe, see Jane Robinson, *Wayward Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 163.

23. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150.

24. Saint Teresa was able to leave her convent even before her reformation of the Carmelite order and subsequent journeys. She had resided in a noblewoman's palace during the spring of 1562. See María de San José Salazar, *Book for the Hour of Recreation*, ed. Weber, 43, n24.

25. *Untold Sisters: Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works*, ed. and introd. Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, trans. Amanda Powell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 9.

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that María Rosa mentions Saint Teresa only once, and in reference to her feast day, it seems highly likely that she would have been familiar with her life and works. During their long journey, the five pilgrims stayed with Carmelite nuns in several different convents, and María Rosa comments on their great admiration for that religious order.<sup>26</sup>

Not all nuns had the freedom to move around like Saint Teresa. The mandates of the Council of Trent meant that they were physically confined in their home convent. Yet several religious women from Spain, such as Sor María Agreda, learned to stretch these guidelines by embarking on spiritual journeys to the New World.<sup>27</sup> María Coronel y Arana was born in 1602 in the small town of Agreda in the north of Spain. Her parents were devout, and her father eventually transformed the family home into a Franciscan convent. María soon joined the order and, at a very young age, became the abbess of the community, a position she held for the rest of her life. She is known for her close friendship and correspondence with the king of Spain, Philip IV, but is best known for her work, *The Mystical City of God*, a biography of the Virgin Mary that she claimed to have written with the aid of revelations from the Virgin herself. According to Clarke Colahan, this shifted Mary's role from that of a passive and meek female to that of an active and powerful example for all women: "The biography, while a creation of the imagination, has offered thousands

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See also Alison Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 165; and Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540–1770*, 145.

26. Although she had no religious vocation, Catalina de Erauso (1592–1650), like Teresa of Avila, also garnered a lot of attention in her own day. Otherwise known as the *Monja Alférez* (Lieutenant Nun), Catalina escaped her convent in San Sebastian, Spain, as a novitiate at the age fifteen. She donned the garb of a man and traveled to the New World to fight in Spain's military battles against the fierce Indian tribe of the *Aracaunos* in Chile. She claims to have written an autobiography documenting her adventures, although there is controversy as to the authorship of that text.

27. Jane Tar has documented the widespread visionary journeys of religious women in Spain during the first third of the seventeenth century. She links this trend specifically to the Franciscans: "My research would seem to indicate that bilocations were particularly characteristic of visionary nuns of the Franciscan order." Tar examines the journeys of Madre Juana de la Cruz de Cubas (1484–1531), Madre Luisa de la Ascensión, Sor Juana Rodríguez de Burgos (1564–1650), Sor María de San José, Sor Beatriz de la Concepción (d. 1645), and Sor María de Agreda. "Flying Through the Empire: The Visionary Journeys of Early Modern Nuns," in *Women's Voices and the Politics of the Spanish Empire*, ed. Jennifer Eich and Jeanne Gillespie (New Orleans, LA: University Press of the South, 2008), 268. For more discussion on both spiritual and real journeys, see Elisa Sampson Vera Tudela, *Colonial Angels* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 1–13.

and thousands of readers a role model who is not passive, but active, powerful, even all knowing, and who was of fundamental importance in the history of the church and mankind in general.”<sup>28</sup>

As an extension of her written works, knowledge spread across Spain of Madre Agreda's extraordinary bilocations to the New World.<sup>29</sup> Though she is said to have never left her home town of Agreda, she swore that Jesus, her guardian angel, and the Virgin Mary often carried her to the territories of northern New Spain. During these bilocations, Madre María claimed to have baptized and preached to the Pecos Indians, specifically to the Jumano of New Mexico, and she became known to them as the “Lady in Blue.”<sup>30</sup>

Just as María Rosa never made any direct references to Saint Teresa, her account fails to mention Madre Agreda as well. Yet it is probable that she would have at least heard of her “traveling” foremother. The Spanish mystic from Agreda was a source of pride for the Franciscan order and was viewed by many as a role model. The obvious difference between Sor Madre Agreda and María Rosa is that the latter was able physically to embark on her transatlantic journey. Further, instead of wanting to baptize and convert the indigenous peoples of New Mexico, her goal was to bring young *criolla* women in Lima to the Capuchin order.<sup>31</sup>

28. Clarke Colahan, *The Visions of Sor María de Agreda* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994), 6.

29. The term *bilocation* comes directly from its Latin roots: *bis*, twice, and *locatio*, place; that is, the ability physically to be in two places at one time. For an excellent analysis of the acceptance of such phenomena in Golden Age Spain, see Stephen Haliczzer, *Female Mystics in the Golden Age of Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4.

30. See John L. Kessell, *Kiva, Cross, and Crown: The Pecos Indians and New Mexico, 1540–1840* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1979), 150–51. Supposedly Sor María Agreda appeared to the Jumano Indians wearing the “deep-blue sackcloth cloak symbolic of the Immaculate Conception.” For further information on bilocation in the New World and the case of a Mexican *beata*, see Sarah Owens, “Journeys to Dark Lands: Francisca de los Angeles' Bilocations to Remote Provinces of New Spain,” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 12, no. 2 (2003): 151–71. This short section on Sor María Agreda is taken from that article.

31. The young women who were to be nuns of the Convent of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in Lima, were all *criollas*—the vast majority of convents were only for white Spanish women born in the New World. In some cases they also housed *peninsulares*—Spanish women born in Europe but who (like the founders) had made the long journey to live in the colonies. Descriptions from “Account of the Journey” lead us to believe that Joseph Fausto Gallegos was a *criollo* from a well-established Lima family. Despite the wealth his family might have attained in the New World, *criollos* were often viewed as second-class citizens by the crown,

*Nuns and Writing in the New World*

Spiritual visions and/or extraordinary bilocations were obviously not the only way to travel to the New World. Several other Spanish religious women made the dangerous sea voyage. In 1530, at the request of the bishop of Mexico City, Juan de Zumárraga, six Franciscan *beatas* (religious laywomen) made the transatlantic crossing to teach young indigenous girls at a school in Texcoco, Mexico. During the next ten years at least twelve more *beatas* came from Spain to teach in ten schools for indigenous girls. However, these schools all were closed by 1540, and soon thereafter the Council of Trent enacted the strict enclosure of religious women.<sup>32</sup> In essence, the Catholic Church believed that these pious laywomen were too active and free, as they were not strictly supervised behind the walls of a cloister. After this initial experiment in Amerindian education led by the pre-Trent Spanish *beatas*, my research has led me to believe that only five Spanish communities sent nuns on the precarious transatlantic journey to set up new convents. The first three foundations came from the Capuchin order: Toledo to Mexico City (San Felipe in 1665), Madrid to Lima (1713), and Madrid to Antigua, Guatemala (1725).<sup>33</sup> A few years later, the aforementioned Brigittine nuns sent a small party of women from Vitoria, Spain, to Mexico City to establish a new convent in 1744.<sup>34</sup> The only other order that sent nuns to the New World was from the *Compañía de María*: they were from Zaragoza, Spain, and established a new convent, *Nuestra Señora del Pilar*, in Mexico City in 1753.<sup>35</sup> These traveling groups of nuns were in the minority because

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thus making it difficult for Gallegos to receive an official appointment. For detailed information on *criollos* and many of the obstacles they faced, see J. H. Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 234–45.

32. See Holler, *Escogidas Plantas*, Introduction, 1–2.

33. For detailed information on the San Felipe foundation, see Emilia Alba González, *Fundación del Convento de San Felipe de Jesús de Clarisas Capuchinas en Nueva España* (Mexico City: Ediciones Dabar, 2002). For information on the Guatemala foundation see Jorge Luján Muñoz, *Guía del convento de capuchinas de Antigua Guatemala* (Antigua, Guatemala: Editorial Jose de Pineda Ibarra, 1977).

34. See Josefina Muriel and Anne Sofie Sifvert, *Crónica del Convento de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves, Santa Brígida de México* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2001). See also Anne Sofie Sifvert, “Crónica de las monjas Brígidas de la Ciudad de México” (Ph.D. diss., University of Stockholm, 1992).

35. María Concepción Amerlinck de Corsi and Manuel Ramos Medina, *Conventos de monjas: Fundaciones en el México virreinal* (Mexico City: Grupo Condumex, 1995), 134–39.

*criolla* women already living in the colonies established the vast majority of convents and founded offshoots from these convents.

Only three convents were established in Lima during the 1500s. This was a relatively small number in comparison with Mexico City, which erected eleven between 1540 and 1601.<sup>36</sup> However, by the end of the sixteenth century Lima was already considered a religious center, boasting more than forty churches and chapels.<sup>37</sup> By the early 1700s convents were in abundance in the viceroyalty of Peru. In the heyday of this era more than 20 percent of Lima's women resided in a convent.<sup>38</sup> There was a wide variety of religious orders in Lima, among others, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Carmelites. However, there were no Capuchin convents in the viceroyalty of Peru during this time—a factor that likely aided these particular Spanish women from Madrid in receiving permission to establish their new convent in Lima.<sup>39</sup>

Travel, as we have seen above, was nothing new to nuns. The Capuchin order, for example, was renowned for its rapid growth throughout Europe and across the globe. If a novice were to take her solemn vows in one of the Spanish nunneries, she could easily learn about previous foundations and possibilities for travel. In Italy alone, for instance, after the establishment of the first Capuchin convent in Naples in 1535, growth was rapid and a grand total of forty-three religious communities was in existence by 1655.<sup>40</sup> From there the Capuchins traveled to Spain, France, Portugal, and the New World. The Madrid nuns continued their order's tradition of travel in the New

36. Nuestra Señora de la Concepción in Mexico City was the first convent established in the Americas in 1540. See Holler, *Escogidas Plantas*, Introduction, 2.

37. See Stacey Schlau, "Angela Carranza: El género sexual, la comercialización religiosa y la subversión de la jerarquía eclesiástica en el Perú colonial," in *Nictimene... sacrilega: Estudios coloniales en homenaje a Georgina Sabat-Rivers*, ed. Mabel Moraña and Yolanda Martínez San-Miguel (Mexico: Universidad del Claustro de Sor Juana, 2003), 112.

38. Mark A. Burkholder and Lyman L. Johnson, *Colonial Latin America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 105.

39. For a comprehensive study of the different female religious orders in colonial Latin America, including countries, cities, and dates of foundation, see Josefina Muriel's table at the end of her chapter "Cincuenta años escribiendo historia de las mujeres," in *El Monacato Femenino en el Imperio Español*, ed. Manuel Ramos Medina (Mexico: Condumex, 1995), 26–31. See also Amaya Fernández Fernández, *La mujer en la conquista y la evangelización en el Perú* (Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 1997), 153–550.

40. Iriarte, *Las capuchinas: Pasado y presente*, 47.

World, because they used the three initial foundations (Mexico City; Antigua, Guatemala; and Lima, Peru) to establish many other nunneries in Latin America (and even as far beyond as the Philippines).<sup>41</sup>

The groups of nuns who made the transatlantic crossing documented their travels either through “foundation” narratives or letters. The narratives were written as official histories of the foundation of the new convent. They were often styled as a book manuscript complete with chapters. Scribes copied them so that at least one copy could be sent to the mother convent and another kept in the new foundation. The nuns left behind were anxious to hear about the details of the long voyage, and these texts were a way to provide the whole convent with a portrait of their travels. Not only were these narratives meant to document the official history of the convent, but they were also meant to be edifying for the new nuns and novices. The authors of these foundation narratives tell us of the hardships encountered during the journey, while they also expound on the devotion and perseverance of the founding nuns. The founding mothers are the true heroes of the narrative, but the reader receives only a polished, “official” version of the journey. This style of writing that presents an “idealized” version of events is reminiscent of the traditional hagiography—a term that refers to the writing of the lives of saints but can be applied to biographies of religious figures as well. The genre of hagiography was well known and embraced by all the orders. Kathleen Ann Myers has written: “By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Hispanic world, the hagiographic tradition had become intertwined with religious women’s own spiritual writings and with clerical biographies of these women.”<sup>42</sup> María Rosa was obviously very familiar with this genre and incorporated it into her narrative. This is most apparent in her description of Madre Estefanía’s breast cancer and subsequent death. Early in the manuscript María Rosa tells her audience that their beloved María Estefanía stoically suffered from a very large breast tumor (*un zaratán*) which would later take her life upon their arrival in Buenos Aires. She is portrayed as an exemplary nun who takes joy in her own suffering. By glorifying the death of the nun, not only does María Rosa praise the Catholic religion, but she also elevates the status of the Capuchin order.

41. *Ibid.*, 62.

42. See Kathleen Ann Myers, *Neither Saints Nor Sinners* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), vii.

*Stormy Waters: The Spanish War of Succession (1701–14)*

When the nuns began their journey in 1710, the political climate in Spain and the rest of Europe was one of change and uncertainty. The Spanish War of Succession was ongoing and the nuns had been advised against traveling during dangerous times. Many ecclesiastical authorities feared for their safety. Nonetheless, the women believed that their trip was destined by God, and when they received permission, they did not hesitate to go ahead with their plans. Little did they realize that they would soon be captured by Dutch corsairs and become prisoners of their Protestant enemies.

The war stemmed from fighting among European nation states to decide who, after the death of Charles II, would be the new ruler of Spain. These thirteen years of fighting made for a murky time of political unrest not only for Spain but also for the rest of Europe. The nuns in the Capuchin convent in Madrid directly witnessed the bitter fighting that took place on Spanish soil. Initially they were present in Madrid for the arrival of the new French king Philip V. He ended the Hapsburg line of monarchs<sup>43</sup> and started the lineage of the Bourbon kings, still in Spain at the present day. Later, in 1706, the nuns witnessed the short siege of Madrid by another claimant to the Spanish throne, the archduke Charles of Hapsburg. The archduke entered Madrid again in 1710, but during this time the five nuns had already begun their journey and were themselves “prisoners” in a Portuguese convent in Lisbon.

This was an anxious time for the five pilgrims because they received several letters from their confessor (he was in Madrid securing new licenses) describing the siege of Madrid by Archduke Charles. According to María Rosa, the enemy troops did not respect the cloistered walls of their home convent. When their sisters in Madrid heard the soldiers banging on the doors, they had the novices shout for help from the convent's windows. The troops entered the convent looking for the count of Pinto, to whom they believed the nuns had given safe haven. According to the mother abbess in Madrid, this was just a pretext to rob the convent of all its precious possessions. Luckily the nuns had time to conceal most of the items in the roof of the convent, including trunks

43. For a concise overview of the end of the Hapsburg line of kings in Spain, see the editor's introduction to María de Guevara, *Warnings to the Kings and Advice on Restoring Spain*, ed. and trans. Nieves Romero-Díaz. *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 7–15.

of valuables sent by several of Madrid's wealthiest residents. The sisters in the capital suffered for three weeks under extreme conditions. They wrote that the only thing left to eat in the convent's dispensary was peas (*alverjas*). The narrator cuts her description short when documenting the atrocities committed by the enemy troops because, in her own words, "I do not want to stir up the bitterness in my heart" (131v).

Despite the unrest of this time, it is understandable that the nuns received permission to travel half way across the world. According to Henry Kamen, the consequences of the war were not as far reaching as originally thought. The majority of the soldiers were foreigners, and economically speaking there was only moderate damage to Spain.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the policies and government brought about by the new Bourbon monarchy were not put in place overnight. There were no drastic changes in the succession of the monarchy in 1700: "The decades before and after 1700 were a continuation of the unbroken course of Spanish history, merging into a middle ground of proximate solutions to permanent problems."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, the Catholic Church still exercised great power in both Spain and the New World. During wartime the church and state were functioning well enough to provide the necessary licenses for the foundation of monasteries and convents in the New World—although the bureaucratic process was slowed down by the political unrest. According to John Lynch, the king did not have absolute control of Spain's government, but was rather part of a large bureaucracy with many controlling factors, including the church, the noble class, and the regional autonomies.<sup>46</sup>

These factors do not take away from the real dangers the pilgrims faced during the Spanish War of Succession. When the Dutch captured the Spanish fleet the women witnessed firsthand the wide cracks that had formed in the armor of the Spanish Empire. As we shall see in the next section, encounters with other European powers, such as the British navy, were no less daunting.

### *The Atlantic World*

By the time of the Spanish War of Succession, several European powers had long been navigating the waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Their

44. Henry Kamen, *Philip V of Spain: The King Who Reigned Twice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 99.

45. John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700–1808* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 1.

46. *Ibid.*, 2.

ships sailed the same waters and inevitably came in contact at sea or on land. Furthermore, due to the unique experiences of conquest and colonization, countries such as Spain, Portugal, France, England, and Holland had shared some similar experiences. Nevertheless, the majority of historical analyses of the last century have focused on individual countries or cultures, thus implying that each country was insulated and acted independently of the others. Recent scholarship has begun to recognize that within the Atlantic world there were more similarities than differences. The experience of the Capuchin nuns confirms that judgment.

María Rosa's perception of Spain's position in the Atlantic world is well illustrated in a passage in which she describes her reaction to a massive British fleet entering the bay at Lisbon. She and the other nuns with her are awestruck by the pompous British navy and she expresses the humiliation she felt:

That same day a British fleet entered the bay with an incredible pomp of bugle calls and many great ships. Their arrogance was revealed in the way they sailed into port. The English had made peace with Portugal and thought themselves to be the owners of the world. Only the Spanish were oppressed and humiliated (77v).

Without realizing it, María Rosa was describing perfectly the waxing of the British Empire and the waning of the Spanish at the outset of the eighteenth century. In the earlier years of its conquest, Spain's monopoly on free labor and precious metals from the New World was the key to the Atlantic economy. By the end of the seventeenth century, all this had changed; Spain's reliance on manufactured goods from the rest of Europe resulted in serious wounds to its whole economy, resulting in its weakening as a maritime power. When María Rosa penned this text, much of the gold from mines in Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico had flowed from Spain into the coffers of other, more productive European countries, thus interlinking all the major European powers.<sup>47</sup>

Yet this nexus between the major powers is not always so easy to define, and contemporary scholars hold differing opinions.<sup>48</sup> Bernard

47. See Bernard Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 87, 88.

48. For an overview of scholarship on the Atlantic world, see Donna Gabaccia, "A Long Atlantic in a Wider World," *Atlantic Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004): 1–27. In her view, research

Bailyn has written: "Atlantic history is the story of a world in motion. Its dominant characteristics shifted repeatedly." Conversely, he notes that we can trace some overarching patterns that connected the three continents of Europe, Africa, and America.<sup>49</sup> Some of these patterns date back to the initial period of conquest; for example, regardless of whether the conqueror was Spanish, French, British, or Dutch, the same brutal tendencies were evident in dealings with native peoples.

Many recent studies have focused on the similarities between Spain and Great Britain. J. H. Elliot has described the immigrant experience to the New World, citing the period 1500 to 1780 when more than 1.5 million Europeans made the transatlantic crossing.<sup>50</sup> The great majority were driven by the hope of riches. Although settlers came from distinct cultural backgrounds, all of them were moving from the known to the unknown, from the imperial metropolis to the peripheral colony. Furthermore, they shared the experience of comparing everything around them with their homeland. Elliot writes: "It was, in any event, only by reference to the familiar that they could make some sense of the unfamiliar that lay all around them."<sup>51</sup> This pervasive characteristic of comparing the New World to the home country is tangible in all the early Spanish "Chronicles of Indies," starting with the diary and letters of Christopher Columbus and continuing throughout the colonial enterprise. Nevertheless, Merry Wiesner-Hanks makes the point that these comparisons are almost always based on a man's point of view and experience. She speculates that if Columbus, for instance, had been a woman, his descriptions of the New World would have been different. She is also careful to contemplate that different does not necessarily mean better. When referring to female heroes of the past she writes: "When we turn to their *words*, however, we often find less to be thrilled at, for they are neither advocates for women's rights nor show any more understanding for other cultures than do their brothers."<sup>52</sup>

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focusing on the major European powers during the period 1500–1800 has loomed large in the studies of Atlantic history. She calls for more studies that link this time period to the twentieth century. See also Lara Putman, "To Study the Fragments/Whole: Microhistory and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 615–30.

49. Bailyn, *Atlantic History*, 61.

50. Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, xiii.

51. *Ibid.*, xiii.

52. Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "The Voyages of Christine Columbus," *World History Connected*, July 2006 <<http://worldhistoryconnected.press.uiuc.edu/3.3/wiesner-hanks.html>> (9 May 2008), 6.