

Towards a Critical Edition of the *Libro del Conorte* of the Abbess Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534)¹

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Introduction

‘And when the Lord gave her this grace, she would first enter a state of ecstasy in the place where that grace came upon her, and the nuns would take her in their arms and place her on a bed. And then, after a little while, they would see signs in her showing that she could see the Lord. [...] And, while she was in ecstasy, she could be heard to call Him, like someone who sees another from afar and wants that person to come closer, and the voice of this blessed one could be heard when she was in ecstasy and could see the Lord and

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was calling Him. And to see the movements that she made with her arms, because her soul was not detached from the body.’²

This first hagiographic source of Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534) describes a series of events that became part of the daily life of the nuns of the Convent of Santa María de la Cruz in the early sixteenth century.³ The woman described in this extract, the abbess of the convent, Juana herself, had been preaching ecstatically in public for thirteen years.⁴ Her six-hour performances had become famous in the Kingdom of Castile; lying on a bed and waving her arms about expressively, occasionally showing the round marks of the stigmata, Juana would explain episodes of sacred history and recount feasts in Heaven before ever larger audiences. Christ, along with many other biblical characters, would engage in dialogue and even sing through her mouth, with revelations of apocalyptic images, expositions of theological topics, and commentaries on the contents of the Bible.⁵

2 These words are from *Vida y fin de la bienaventurada virgen sancta Juana de la Cruz*, fols. 27v-28r (henceforth *Vida y fin*), preserved in the Royal Library (Real Biblioteca) of the Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial, catalog number K-III-13, ed. María Luengo Balbás and Fructuoso Atencia Requena (2019), published in the ‘Catálogo de santas vivas’ (http://catalogodesantasvivas.visionarias.es/index.php/Juana_de_la_Cruz, accessed on 15 January 2022), hereafter *Vida y fin*. The English translations are mine.

3 The convent was located in Cubas de la Sagra, part of the Archdiocese of Toledo in the Kingdom of Castile. For an updated bibliography and a study on this hagiographic source as a convent chronicle, see Pablo Acosta-García, ‘Radical Succession: Hagiography, Reform, and Franciscan Identity in the Convent of the Abbess Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534)’, *Religions* 12 (2021), 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12030223>.

4 This duration is repeated in several sources; according to Inocente García Andrés, the testimonies of the Apostolic Process are unanimous on this point (see his *El Conhorte: Sermones de una mujer. La Santa Juana (1482-1534). Introducción, teología y espiritualidad*, PhD dissertation (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1996), 146 [accessible online: <https://summa.upsa.es/details.vm?q=id:0000030260&lang=en&view=main>, accessed on 18 January 2022], hereafter *Conhorte* 1996). See also, Juana de la Cruz, *El Conhorte: Sermones de una Mujer. La Santa Juana (1481–1534)*, ed. Inocente García Andrés, 2 Vols. (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española - Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1999) I, 135 (hereafter *Conhorte* 1999); *Vida y fin*, fol. 31r, and below, where the same information is mentioned in the quotation from the so-called *Libro de la casa* (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/9661). On Juana in the context of medieval female preachers, see Bert Roest, ‘Female Preaching in the Late Medieval Franciscan Tradition’, *Franciscan Studies* 62 (2004), 149-154, and Carolyn Muessig, ‘Women as Performers of the Bible: Female Preaching in Premodern Europe’, in: *Performing the Sacred: Christian Representation and the Arts*, ed. Carla M. Bino and Corinna Ricasoli (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 116-139.

5 On the audience and the characteristics of her performances, see the description in *Vida y fin*, f. 27v. On her stigmatization, see Pablo Acosta-García, ‘En viva sangre bañadas’: Caterina da

Around thirteen years later, more than seventy of her visionary sermons were compiled in the massive *Libro del conorte* (also commonly known in English as *Book of Consolation*).⁶

This article constitutes a first effort to organize the materials, reflections and unresolved questions that have emerged from my recent years of study of Juana de la Cruz and the *Conorte*. If all goes according to plan, this will culminate in both the first critical edition of the text and a monograph on the transcription and collection of her sermons.⁷ Since this is research in progress, some of the questions that I raise here are still subject to development and discussion. I would, however, like to offer some preliminary reflections on the material evidence of this case in order to highlight specifically the need for a re-evaluation of the codices containing the *Conorte* and also of the discourse containing the actual words uttered by Juana. In the first part of the paper therefore, I present the two different manuscripts that include Juana's sermons and revisit their implications in the history of Juana's canonization process in order to address certain codicological, philological and ideological issues that need to be urgently re-considered before a hermeneutic reading of the text can take place. In the second part,

Siena y las vidas de María de Ajofrín, Juana de la Cruz, María de Santo Domingo y otras santas vivas castellanas', *Archivio Italiano per la Storia della Pietà* 33 (2021), 165-170, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4580499>.

6 The bibliography on Juana since the groundbreaking works of Ronald E. Surtz, *The Guitar of God. Gender, Power, and Authority in the Visionary World of Mother Juana de la Cruz (1481–1534)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) and *Writing Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain: The Mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) is immense. In particular, the research pieces published by María del Mar Graña Cid, Ángela Muñoz Fernández, Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida, and Jessica Boon that I quote in the pages that follow have been of great importance. There is a partial English translation of the sermons: Juana de la Cruz, *Mother Juana de la Cruz, 1481–1534: Visionary Sermons*, ed. Jessica Boon and Ronald E. Surtz; trans. Ronald E. Surtz and Nora Weinerth (Toronto-Tempe: Iter Academic Press-Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016). As I reiterate below, the order and arrangement of the sermons is different in each of the codices, which affects their numbering: the Vatican codex (Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Congr. SS. Rituum Processus 3074) has 71 sermons (last rubric, fol. 718v); the El Escorial codex (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, manuscript J-II-18, hereafter the El Escorial codex) has 72 sermons (last rubric, fol. 444r). There is another transcribed sermon in the so-called *Libro de la casa* (Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/9661), fols. 61v-67r. In the pages that follow, whenever a sermon is identified by its number, it follows the numbering of *Conhorte* 1999.

7 Additional results of this research will be published in the forthcoming monograph Pablo Acosta-García, *Liturgy and Revelation in the Book of the Conhorte by the Abbess Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534)* (Leiden: Brill, 2024).

I try to identify what we understand by the *Conorte* or, in other words, what we know and do not know about its collective writing, compilation, and use by the community of the Convent of Santa María de la Cruz.

Before beginning my analysis, it is worth sketching out the Observant context in which Juana's charismatic activity unfolded. Her convent and its reform was part of the general campaign of the Catholic Monarchs to reform the religious communities of Castile at the end of the fifteenth century.⁸ Francisco Ximénez de Cisneros, the energetic Franciscan Observant Provincial, was chosen to reform all the female religious houses in the realm.⁹ The historical situation at the time was so complex, varied and changeable that it is difficult to grasp and explain as a whole or make generalizations about it, so that the reform process as it affected the female religious houses should certainly be understood in terms of individual cases.¹⁰ Nevertheless, two broad, complementary developments can be mentioned. First there was a process of progressive monasticization of *beatas* and houses of tertiaries and which obviously affected Juana's community,¹¹ and second, there was support for strong female religious leaders

8 For the late medieval reformist movements of religious life in Castile, see José García Oro, 'Conventualismo y observancia. La reforma de las órdenes religiosas en los siglos XV y XVI', in *Historia de la Iglesia en España*, ed. Ricardo García-Villoslada, 3 Vols. (Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1980) III.1, 211-290. For the Catholic Monarchs' reform, see Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmo y España* (Mexico: FCE, 1996 (1937)), 1-83 and José García Oro, *Cisneros y la reforma del clero español en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* (Madrid: CSIC, 1971).

9 On Cardinal Cisneros, see José García Oro, *El cardenal Cisneros. Vida y empresas* (Madrid: BAC, 1992) and Joseph Pérez, *Cisneros, el cardenal de España* (Madrid: Taurus, 2014). On the reform of the female houses, see García Oro, *Cisneros y la reforma*, 253-254.

10 García Oro, *Cisneros y la reforma*, 171-172. For a revision of the concept of reform in Castile, focused on the Dominican case, see Mercedes Pérez Vidal, 'La reforma de los monasterios de dominicas en Castilla: agentes, etapas y consecuencias', *Archivo dominicano* 36 (2015), 197-237.

11 See Ángela Muñoz Fernández, *Beatas y santas neocastellanas. Ambivalencias de la religión y políticas correctoras del poder (siglos XIV-XVII)* (Madrid: Dirección General de la Mujer, 1994), 30-31, and Idem 'Iberian Women in Religion and Policies of Discipline. Dissent in the Archbishopric of Toledo in the 15th to Early 16th Centuries: The Heaven of Juana de la Cruz', in: *Strategies of Non-Confrontational Protest in Europe from the Twelfth to the Early Sixteenth Century*, ed. Fabrizio Titone (Rome: Viella, 2016), 195-217; and Laurey Braguier, *Servantes de Dieu. Les beatas de la couronne de Castille (1450-1600)* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019), 363-384. On the monasticization of Juana's community, see María del Mar Graña Cid, 'El cuerpo femenino y la dignidad sacerdotal de las mujeres. Claves de autoconciencia feminista en la experiencia mística de Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534)', in: *Umbra, Imago, Veritas. Homenaje a los profesores Manuel Gesteira, Eusebio Gil y Antonio Vargas Machuca*, ed. Secundino Castro Sánchez, Fernando Millán Romeral, and Pedro Rodríguez (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Comillas, 2004), 309-310.

via the cultivation of charismatic gifts and prophecy.¹² Indeed, some of these women would help Cisneros with his reform plans, the most famous being those of two stigmatics similar to Caterina of Siena: the Dominican tertiary María de Santo Domingo and Juana de la Cruz herself.¹³

To better illustrate the role of women prophets in the Cardinal's reform, one of the measures he devised to support this leadership may perhaps be highlighted. Between 1502 and 1512, Cisneros commissioned the publication – in some cases, the translation – of the writings of the most famous late medieval female European mystics. This unprecedented campaign involving the dissemination of hagiographies and/or treatises of major visionary figures with different religious profiles, such as Catherine of Siena, Angela of Foligno, and Mechthild of Hackeborn (especially important for the composition of the *Conorte*) founded what we may call the age of the Castilian *sante vive*.¹⁴

This was the context when Juana was proclaimed abbess in 1509, the year that coincides with the beginning of the reform and subsequent monasticization of her convent of Franciscan tertiaries.¹⁵ According to chronicles and certain testimonies from her canonization process, the religious house was not subjected to enclosure during Juana's life, while the community was granted the benefice of the parish church attached to the convent and began to receive rents. Through the grace of Cisneros and the

12 Cisneros' support of mystic phenomenology as a way of promoting radical religious change had very deep roots which have been well studied. See, for example, Pedro Sainz Rodríguez, *La siembra mística del Cardenal Cisneros y las reformas en la Iglesia* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1979). For a case study, see Jodi Bilinkoff, 'A Spanish Prophetess and Her Patrons: The Case of María de Santo Domingo', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23 (1992), 21-34, and also her article 'Charisma and Controversy: The Case of María de Santo Domingo', in: *Spanish Women in the Golden Age: Images and Realities*, ed. Magdalena S. Sánchez and Alain Saint-Saëns (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1996), 23-35.

13 See Rebeca Sanmartín Bastida, 'La construcción de la santidad en María de Santo Domingo: la imitación de Catalina de Siena', *Ciencia Tomista* 140 (2013), 141-159.

14 I have worked extensively on this publication campaign. See Pablo Acosta-García, 'On Manuscripts, Prints and Blessed Transformations: Caterina da Siena's *Legenda maior* as a Model of Sainthood in Premodern Castile', *Religions* 11:33 (2020), 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11010033>; Idem, 'Women Prophets for a New World: Angela of Foligno, 'Living Saints', and the Religious Reform Movement in Cardinal Cisneros' Castile', in *Exemplarity and Gender in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, ed. Maria Morrás, Rebeca Sanmartín & Yonsoo Kim (Leiden, Brill: 2020), 136-162; Idem, 'Santas y marcadas: itinerarios de lectura modélicos en la obra de las místicas bajomedievales impresas por Cisneros', *Hispania Sacra* 72:145 (2020), 67-80. <https://doi.org/10.3989/hs.2020.011>.

15 *Conborte* 1999, 65.

support of Pope Julius II, the abbess took on certain responsibilities normally undertaken by a parish priest, especially those concerning pastoral care, which included public preaching.¹⁶ As a result of the burning of the convent's archives and library during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the consequent disappearance of most of the documentation relating to it, our knowledge of the preaching activity of the abbess comes mainly from four quite different sources:¹⁷

- a) The various hagiographies of the abbess, especially the first, *Vida y fin*, which as I have recently pointed out, should be read as a collective chronicle of the reform;¹⁸
- b) The testimonies given during the diocesan process of beatification and canonization (1613-1617), and the apostolic processes in Toledo (1619-1620) and Rome (1621-1731);¹⁹
- c) The *Libro de la casa* (hereafter *Book of the House*), a collection of some of the para-liturgical traditions and customs of the convent that are particularly associated with Juana, and are preserved in a copy from the seventeenth century;²⁰
- d) The two manuscripts of the *Conorte* whose sermons were compiled before 1525: one in the Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de

16 On the privilege granted by Cisneros, see *Conhorte* 1996, 27, plus the transcription of the documents in 'Apéndice 2º', 519-526, and also *Conhorte* 1999, 55-64. For the rule followed after 1509, see Graña Cid, 'El cuerpo femenino', 309-310 and Acosta-García, 'Radical Succession', 8-9.

17 '[El convento] sufrirá las consecuencias de los avatares históricos y políticos del país, como, invasión de las tropas francesas, desamortización de Mendizábal o su destrucción en la Guerra Civil, siendo destruidos, no sólo, su fábrica, sino también su biblioteca y su archivo.' (<http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/autoridad/7165>, accessed on 15 January 2022). This list could be completed with the documents collected for the reopening of her canonization cause at the beginning of the twentieth century: Jesús Gómez López, 'Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534) 'La Santa Juana': Vida, obra, santidad y causa', in: *La clausura femenina en España: actas del simposium: 1/4-IX-2004*, ed. Francisco Javier Campos and Fernández de Sevilla, 2 Vols. (Madrid: Real Centro Universitario Escorial-María Cristina, 2004) II, 1223-1250.

18 Acosta-García, 'Radical Succession'.

19 See *Conhorte* 1996, 143-145; *Conhorte* 1999, 131-147, and Gómez López, 'Juana de la Cruz', 1249-1250.

20 The *Libro de la casa y monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Cruz* (Biblioteca Nacional de España, MSS/9661) is known by this name because it bears an ownership mark on fol. 1r which reads: 'Este libro es de la casa y monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Cruz [...]', in other words, that it was originally kept in the convent library belonging to Juana's community. The approximate date of composition (seventeenth century) is in the *Inventario general de los manuscritos de la Biblioteca Nacional* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional - Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2000) XIV (nos. 9501-10200), 112.

El Escorial, catalog number J-II-18, and the two volumes in the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, catalog number Congr. SS. Rituum Processus 3074.²¹

The extant codices and the process of canonization

These two manuscripts of the *Conorte* are the only ones to survive of what we may assume was a wider historical circulation, at least within the convent walls.²² As can be deduced from the annotations added to the margins of the El Escorial codex by the Franciscan friar Francisco de Torres (1523-1580),²³ it was taken to the Convent of San Juan de los Reyes (Toledo), where it was probably kept during the lifetime of the abbess (d. 1534), and where he annotated it in 1567-1568.²⁴ According to García Andrés, the volume was probably moved later to the Convent of El Escorial when the Royal Library collection was being built during the reign of Philip II (d. 1598).²⁵ On the other hand, the origin and migration of the Vatican manuscript is not as complex, because we know for certain that this was a copy that was sent directly to the Vatican from the library of the Convent of Santa María de la Cruz in Cubas de la Sagra in 1665, during the second stage of Juana's canonization process.²⁶ In the pontifical documentation, the abbess at the time (who had lived in the cloister since about 1618) declared under oath that the documents sent to Rome (a late copy of the first hagiography of Juana, now lost, plus the Vatican codex) were the only ones that she had ever seen in the convent library.²⁷ It is also made clear that this particular manuscript was venerated by the nuns, who considered it to be 'the authentic one', which is an important point for what follows.²⁸

21 On these two manuscripts, see *Conhorte* 1996, 179-185 and *Conhorte* 1999, 69-74.

22 Two examples: the first, in a passage from the *Libro de la casa* quoted in full further down in this article, while talking about the apotropaic powers of the *Book*, one of the next generation of nuns in the convent states that '... during storms, the abbess [*la prelada*] orders the holy book or its copies [o sus traslados] to be brought out' (my emphasis). The second, in *Conhorte* 1996, 147, García Andrés paraphrases the words of a nun who again uses 'the *Book* or its copies' to drive demons away from a dying nun.

23 See *Conhorte* 1996, 100-102 and *Conhorte* 1999, 70 and 100-116.

24 *Conhorte* 1996, 101 and *Conhorte* 1999, 70.

25 *Conhorte* 1996, 186-187 and *Conhorte* 1999, 70.

26 *Conhorte* 1996, 151; *Conhorte* 1999, 69-70 and 141-142.

27 *Conhorte* 1996, 171 and *Conhorte* 1999, 162.

28 *Conhorte* 1996, 151 and *Conhorte* 1999, 142.

Furthermore, the Vatican codex is very likely to be the same manuscript that two very important hagiographers of Juana, Antonio Daza and Pedro Navarro, read when they were writing their respective hagiographies of the abbess.²⁹ As I go on to show, both codices have been dated to the first half of the sixteenth century, based on a very superficial analysis of the script, the information contained in the colophon and (in the case of the El Escorial manuscript only) the annotations mentioned above.³⁰

In 1999, García Andrés compiled and edited the historical vicissitudes of Juana's canonization process and the El Escorial manuscript respectively in a published excerpt of his PhD dissertation, presented three years earlier.³¹ At that time, García Andrés was not only one of those mainly responsible for reopening the cause for canonization of the abbess, but had also been its vice-postulator since 1996.³² In his dissertation, he explicitly stated that he hoped that his work would serve to unblock the cause, which had been stalled since the eighteenth century for the simple reason that it was not possible to prove that the text of the sermons contained in the *Conhorte* were *authored* by Juana, at least in the form shown in the Vatican manuscript.³³ The argument about the authenticity of Juana's writings became crucial to the achievement of her canonization from the second phase of the process (1664-1679), when the cause started to be regulated

29 *Conhorte* 1996, 171-172 and 189.

30 For a superficial comparison of the material characteristics of both codices, see *Conhorte* 1999, 71-72. The Royal Library of the Convent of El Escorial gives 1509 as 'publication date' (<https://rbmecat.patrimonionacional.es/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=738>, accessed on 16/12/2021), which follows Julián Zarco Cuevas, *Catálogo de los manuscritos castellanos de la Real Biblioteca de El Escorial*, 2 Vols. (Madrid: Imprenta Helénica, 1924-1929) II, 99: 'letra de 1509', which extracts this information from the colophon. There it is stated that the book was 'written' ('escriviose', El Escorial codex, fol. 454v) in 1509. On the composition date of the *Book*, see *Conhorte* 1996, 192-194.

31 *Conhorte* 1996 and *Conhorte* 1999, respectively. On the three historical phases of the process of canonization, see *Conhorte* 1996, 149-154 and *Conhorte* 1999, 139-169.

32 Gómez López, 'Juana de la Cruz', 1250.

33 See especially the following statements not included in *Conhorte* 1999: 'Finalmente, el presente trabajo pretende servir para el desbloqueo del proceso de canonización de una mujer que, desde el instante de su muerte y de forma ininterrumpida, ha sido proclamada como Santa, ya que fueron los escritos la causa de que los procesos no llegaran a feliz término' (*Conhorte* 1996, 8), and 'Los pasos siguientes serán: lograr la aprobación de los escritos, del *Conhorte*, por parte de Roma; y después, preparada la correspondiente *positio*, alcanzar el reconocimiento del culto' (*Conhorte* 1996, 516).

by the Apostolic Constitution of Urban VIII, 'Caelestis Hierusalem Cives' (1623-1634).³⁴

This change in the judicial framework of the cause is essential to understanding its subsequent transformations, since in order to prove the abbess's reputation of sanctity, the Sacred Congregation of Rites needed to examine not only the writings *about* the Servant of God (for instance, hagiographies of her), but also *her own writings*, which in this case and for this purpose only, had been collected together in the convent library of Santa María de la Cruz in 1665. This, as indicated above, happened around the same time that the Vatican manuscript was sent to Rome, constituting the heart of the discussion between postulators and promoters of the faith until the process was blocked in the first half of the eighteenth century.³⁵ Reading García Andrés' excellent summary of the development of the debate between the postulators and the promoters of the faith is like witnessing a true battle of dialectics, with both sides employing concepts and arguments more typical of literary scholars than theologians, but both seeking to clarify one main question: was there any way of proving beyond any doubt that the sermons contained in the Vatican manuscript were the original words spoken by the abbess?

The initial strategy of the postulators in the second phase of the canonization process (1664-1679) was to prove that the *Conorte* contained her *original* words.³⁶ There was, however, a constant gap that was never explained between her ecstatic preaching and the text, which was reinforced by different sources talking about nun-scribes remembering the sermons by heart and writing them down later, instead of Juana de la Cruz dictating them herself. This gap between preaching and text proved to be an insurmountable obstacle,³⁷ and the process was put on hold for some thirty years.

In the third phase of the process (1702-1731), the postulators followed a different strategy. Since the Vatican Codex was the main obstacle to demonstrating Juana's reputation for sanctity, they followed the path

34 *Conhorte* 1996, 150; *Conhorte* 1999, 141.

35 See above, n. 26.

36 *Conhorte* 1996, 150-153.

37 On this issue, see the defense written by José Coppons on behalf of the Franciscan Order, especially *Conhorte* 1999, 145.

recently opened up by the promoters of the faith, who were trying to invalidate the manuscript as a text that reliably reflected Juana's discourse.³⁸ That strategy also failed, because it was clear to the promoters of the faith that Juana's sermons were an unavoidable issue to be resolved on the path to sanctity. The final answer from the promoter of the faith at the time, given in a rescript of the Congregation issued on 20 September, 1729 was crystal clear: 'Non posse procedi ad ulteriora, nisi exhibeatur libri originales'; in other words, if the Vatican codex was not the original transcription of the sermons, the original had to be found before proceeding further.³⁹ The process was completely blocked until almost two centuries later, when García Andrés, whose interests were both scientific and religious, announced that he had found a second source for the *Conorte* following the indications of some Franciscan friars who knew of the location of a second copy in the Royal Library of El Escorial.⁴⁰ In both his PhD dissertation and the later introduction to his edition, García Andrés considered that this codex was 'the first and original [manuscript] that collected the sermons of Juana de la Cruz'.⁴¹ His reasons for this assertion rested mainly on three arguments:⁴²

- a) The first concerns the aforementioned marginalia in the El Escorial Codex, which allow us to place it at an early date. This copy is heavily glossed by two well-known Franciscans, and also heavily censored by a third anonymous individual. The first of these annotators was Fray Francisco Ortiz (1497-1545), a Franciscan who was considered a heretic by the Inquisition because of his links to the heresy of the *Alumbrados*, which dates its circulation therefore to the first half of the sixteenth century, most probably during Juana's lifetime.⁴³
- b) The second concerns its form, which García Andrés describes (with good reason) as 'unpolished, less elaborate, and using a less careful

38 *Conhorte* 1996, 153-155 and *Conhorte* 1999, 147-148.

39 *Conhorte* 1996, 172.

40 See *Conhorte* 1996, 6, where he states that he had visited the Royal Library of San Lorenzo de El Escorial in 1976, just one year before Ronald Surtz (*The Guitar*, XI). In fact, the works that Surtz published during the 1990s marked a real rebirth in studies on Juana de la Cruz after the time that had elapsed since the process for her canonization.

41 *Conhorte* 1996, 189 and *Conhorte* 1999, 73.

42 *Conhorte* 1996, 187-188 and 514-516.

43 *Conhorte* 1996, 90; *Conhorte* 1999, 95.

syntax'.⁴⁴ Indeed, in general, the Vatican manuscript contains longer versions of the sermons, alterations, and what seem at first sight to be sentences and/or glosses added to the main text.

- c) The third concerns their ordering. García Andrés also points out, following Surtz, that these textual differences are not only visible in the composition, but also in the slightly different organization of the two codices. He attributes these changes to some 'expert [clerical] hand' ('mano de algún experto'), who would have taken the primitive textual version from the El Escorial manuscript and transformed it into a longer one.⁴⁵

As a result of the massive and timely two-volume edition of the text contained in the El Escorial Codex provided by García Andrés in 1999, together with the poor material condition of the Vatican manuscript, part of the scholarship on Juana de la Cruz has generally privileged the first source.⁴⁶ In my view, this is a praxis that we should hold in abeyance (or at least be aware of) when interpreting Juana's words. My preliminary comparison of the two manuscripts has highlighted the need to collate both texts in any hermeneutic approach since, as we already knew from the works of Surtz, the Vatican version occasionally contains information that is missing from its counterpart.⁴⁷

For a good example of this, in a recent article on Juana de la Cruz's *cancionero*, I edited from one of the sermons a song that the Lord sang to His mother, the Virgin Mary, thereby demonstrating that the Vatican manuscript contained unpublished verses and that any reconstruction of a more complete version of the song would need to take both codices into account. Apart from the new material, the Vatican codex also has some

44 *Conhorte* 1999, 71: 'tosca, menos elaborada, de sintaxis menos cuidada'.

45 *Conhorte* 1999, 73.

46 In a 'Note on the Text' that precedes his famous essay on Juana's theology, Surtz, *The Guitar*, considers it more difficult to read because of its poor material condition but, as his work suggests and as has been confirmed by Jessica Boon in private correspondence, he always cross-checked both versions. On the other hand, García Andrés asserts that, as a result of the heavy censorship, it is impossible to read some of the sermons in the El Escorial manuscript, which means that it is essential to consult the Vatican manuscript in order to transcribe the text of the Sermon on the Trinity (*Conhorte* 1999, 74).

47 *Conhorte* 1996, 188-189.

lacunae at this point, so that it is only possible to fill in the blanks when the text of both manuscripts is taken into account:⁴⁸

Vatican codex, fol. 13v	El Escorial codex, fol. 21v	Reconstruction
[...]miga, [...]e contentaste. Tú so[...]mada escogida entre millares. Tú sola, mi rreyna, en quien yo rreyné e moré. Tú sola, mi esposa, de[...]o me pagu[...]. [...] escogida, de q[...]é. Tú sola, mi enamorada, con quien mucho me deleité. Tú sola, mi paloma, con quien yo mucho folgué. Tú sola, la más santa, que e fallado ni fallaré.	Tú sola, mi amiga, tú sola me contentaste. Tú sola, mi amada, escogida entre millares. Tú sola, my rreyna, en quien yo rreyné y moré. Tú sola, la más santa, que e hallado ni hallaré.	[Tú sola, mi a]miga, [tú sola m]e contentaste. Tú so[la, mi a]mada, escogida entre millares. Tú sola, mi rreyna, en quien yo rreyné e moré. Tú sola, mi esposa, de[quien y]o me pagu[é]. [Tú sola, mi] escogida, de q[uien yo me ...]é. Tú sola, mi enamorada, con quien mucho me deleité. Tú sola, mi paloma, con quien yo mucho folgué. Tú sola, la más santa, que e fallado ni fallaré.

Returning to García Andrés’ words about the *original* manuscript, I would remind the reader here that the Spanish editor is intentionally adopting the technical vocabulary used in the process of Juana’s canonization dealing with the canonical issues of the *authenticity* and *originality* of her hypothetical words, projecting them onto the case that is still open, and hoping to unblock it with his new findings. In fact, as I have shown, the problems about *reportatio*, dictation, and authority that I am studying are reflected and explicitly discussed in the documents of the canonical process.

48 See Pablo Acosta-García, ‘El cancionero revelado de la abadesa franciscana Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534). Edición y comentario’, *Studia aurea* 15 (2021), 505, which contains an erratum in note 10, which transcribes the verses from the Escorial Codex instead of from the Vatican codex. ‘You alone my friend / You alone made me happy/ You alone my beloved, / Chosen from among thousands. // You alone, my queen, / in whom I reigned and dwelt, / You alone, my bride / Are the one / by whom I was captivated. // You alone, my chosen one, / Of whom I ... / You alone, my beloved, / In whom I greatly delighted. // You alone, my dove, / With whom I had much joy, / You alone, the saintliest / that I have found or ever will.’ (I thank Janet Dawson for the English translation of the reconstructed version of the song).

What is the *Conorte*?

‘There follow some songs that, it seems, the Lord himself sang sometimes, and to which his servant [the abbess] responded. And we [nosotras] could hear Him. Well, there would be around forty of us there, and often fifty. And I say fifty because we were frequently close to that number. And at other times, more than one hundred and fifty came.’⁴⁹

I provide fresh evidence here to support the theory of the collective authorship of the sermons.⁵⁰ This text heads a group of five chants intoned by Juana during her ecstasies, using different voices (mainly that of the Lord) while singing. The songs are copied in the same hand as the rest of the Vatican manuscript.⁵¹ As we can see, the Spanish feminine plural ending of *nosotras* (‘E *nosotras* lo oýamos’) is unambiguous. The transcriptions were probably made by a single nun, but on behalf of a group that considered these revealed songs sufficiently important to be written down and remembered. The problem that arises here is how we should interpret this collective subject with respect to the written codification of Juana’s preaching and the different stages of the *Conorte*’s composition. A first approach to this should be to discuss the traditional view that one of Juana’s fellow nuns, María Evangelista, was the sole redactor of her preaching.⁵² Her importance in the convent is particularly apparent in a passage from the *Book of the House*, in which, after Juana’s death, one of the next generation of nuns has the following vision:

‘A nun [...] once [s]aw María Evangelista, who was already deceased, enter through the door of the church with the book that she wrote called the *Holy Consolation of the Sermons that the Lord Preached*

49 The original paragraph is edited in Acosta-García, *El cancionero revelado*, 511.

50 The collective authorship of the *Conorte* has been suggested and discussed by Graña Cid, ‘Encarnar la palabra’ and Jessica A. Boon, ‘Introduction’, in *Mother Juana de la Cruz, 1481–1534: Visionary Sermons*, ed. Jessica A. Boon and Ronald E. Surtz, trans. Ronald E. Surtz and Nora Weinerth (Toronto-Tempe: Iter Academic Press-Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2016), 15–16.

51 For an edition of the songs and the original annotation in Spanish, see *Ibidem*.

52 On María Evangelista, see *Conhorte* 1996, 179–186 and *Conhorte* 1999, 20–27. I thank Patricia Stoop for recommending the use of ‘redactor’ here.

Through the Mouth of our Holy Mother Saint Juana, who said it was gold, and in the other hand, a green cross. And this lady, María Evangelista, did not know how to write, and the Lord graciously granted her the gift of writing so that she could write this holy book [...]. The Lord preached for thirteen years, and this holy book was written [from sermons preached] only in the last two. The Lord bestowed upon it [the book] many blessings and virtues against demons and storms [...]. And during storms the abbess [*la prelada*] orders the holy book or its copies to be brought out, and the storm has often been seen to subside.⁵³

The main aspect that I would like to comment on is the role that tradition assigns to María Evangelista, who had already passed away in this vision. We read that she ‘did not know how to write and the Lord graciously granted her the gift of writing so that she could write this holy book.’ This statement captures two general tendencies in the Cubas community: the first is that they tended to follow the model of sanctity established in the earliest versions of the hagiography of Caterina of Siena, namely her *Legenda maior*. So, in the above passage, María Evangelista’s sudden ability to write seems to mirror the episode in which God miraculously granted Caterina of Siena the same ability.⁵⁴ The main implication of this hagiographic *topos* would be that the gift of prophecy of the illiterate Juana is used to form a counterpoint to the miraculous skills of one of their own nuns, María Evangelista, as a scribe and copyist. Following from this, the second general tendency of the Cubas community hagiographies is to refer to María Evangelista as the sole person responsible for transcribing the sermons of Juana.⁵⁵

In fact, the hagiographies of Juana state that the abbess would preach in sessions lasting about six hours.⁵⁶ According to two fellow nuns who had known María Evangelista while she was alive, the latter had ‘such a faithful and retentive memory that when the sermon was finished, she immediately

53 *Libro de la casa*, fols. 20r–20v.

54 See Acosta-García, ‘On manuscripts’, 9–12.

55 This second issue concerning the *originality* of the sermons in terms of their transcription is extremely important from the second stage (1664–1679) of the cause for canonization onwards, see above.

56 *Vida y fin*, fol. 28r and fol. 31r.

wrote it down'.⁵⁷ This superhuman capacity is based, again, on the belief anchored in the collective memory of the convent that this nun was the female evangelist who divinely transcribed Juana's words.⁵⁸ On this particular point, I agree with both Graña Cid's and Boon's notion of María Evangelista as the iconic figure established in the collective memory of the convent as the one and only scribe, transcriber, and writer, even though there is sufficient textual evidence to allow us to talk about the communal effort of a number of nuns.⁵⁹ It is very likely, in fact, that María Evangelista shared both this writing skill and her role as copyist with some of the nuns of the Convent of Santa María de la Cruz.⁶⁰ Perhaps the strongest indication supporting this is the long passage in the *Conhorte* about the actual creation of the book. In this passage, the nuns declare that they were collecting the words of their abbess following the orders of 'some prelates': 'And He [the Lord] even said (and it was done as He promised), that he would give us light and memory in order to retain them [Christ's words] and write them down. We beseeched [Him], because we were ordered by

57 According to the hagiography by Pedro Navarro (1659). See the original context in Acosta-García, 'Radical Succession', 239-240.

58 See for instance one of the testimonies in the Apostolic process in *Conhorte* 1996, 147.

59 On María Evangelista as just one of the redactors, see Boon, 'Introduction', 16.

60 Graña Cid, 'Encarnar la palabra: oralidad, lectura y escritura en las profetisas castellanas del Renacimiento', *Estudios eclesiásticos* 91:358 (2016), 597. On this point, see also the compilation and discussion of sources in Ibidem, 597-603, where she sets out the major evidence for collective literacy in the convent. In addition to the annotation that heads Juana's *cancionero* (see above), these pieces of evidence are found in other areas: a) hagiographical writing, such as Antonio Daza, *Éxtasis y revelaciones de la bienaventurada Virgen Santa Juana de la Cruz, de la Tercera Orden de nuestro Seráfico Padre S. Francisco* (Zaragoza: Lucas Sánchez, 1611), fol. 61v, which mentions, together with Evangelista, two other amanuenses: Catalina de San Francisco and Catalina de los Mártires ('Las religiosas que escribieron ese libro, fueron, la madre Soror María Evangelista [y esta la que más escribió y a quién sin saber leer, ni escribir, dio nuestro Señor esta gracia...], Soror Catalina de San Francisco, se llamó la segunda, y Soror Catalina de los Martyres la tercera, de lo qual hay tradición y es pública voz y fama en el Monasterio de la Cruz...'), see Graña Cid, 'Encarnar la palabra', 597, n. 43; b) the following fragments of *Libro de la casa* in which revelation and literacy are associated with different nuns, not specifically with Evangelista: fol. 13v: 'Hijas mías, gozaos contino/ en la esperança de mí,/ y en papel de pergamino/ mis palabras escribid,/ por que si alguien las pidiere/ para las trasladar,/ y si deboción tubieren,/ se las podades prestar...', and fols. 16v-17r; c) some testimonies found in her canonization process and their interpretation by the theologians: *Conhorte* 1999, 138, 145, 149, 158, 159 in contrast to those that only mention María Evangelista: *Conhorte* 1999, 136-137; d) the passage discussed next in the *Book* where the first person feminine plural pronoun is used to explain the transcription of the sermons.

certain prelates to do it [retain what we had heard from Him and write it down]'.⁶¹

In short, the narrative of the *Conorte* indicates that the codification of Juana's preaching in writing was authored by various nuns belonging to her community (*nosotras*), which is also supported by various testimonies given during the canonization process and by the hagiographies written about her. Far from being exceptional, this kind of group authorship associated with recollections of charismatic preaching was common in nunneries across Europe from at least the thirteenth century. For instance, think of the famous article by Margarete Hubrath about the community of Helfta, and the composition of Mechthild of Hackeborn's *Liber specialis gratiae* (which, not by chance, was one of the earliest printed books by Cardinal Cisneros to support his reform),⁶² or, for a period chronologically contemporary with Juana's activity, the Italian visionary preachers brought to light by Gabriella Zarri and others.⁶³ Indeed, as Zarri has said, late medieval and early modern sermon collections by women's religious communities 'constitute something more than a clue, and show some similarities that allow us to deduce a shared practice'.⁶⁴

My own view is that Juana's sermons are best understood when we consider them as part of the wider context of Observant cloisters in which *scrittura comunitaria* was common practice.⁶⁵ The model of composition of the *Liber specialis gratiae* and later compilations of convent sermons in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are useful for discussing possible tasks and processes underlying the creation of the *Conorte*. The various studies of these practices by Dutch nuns carried out by Mertens and Stoop, for example, depict highly complex processes involving the memorizing,

61 *Conborte* 1999, 1473, briefly discussed in *Conborte* 1996, 189-190. See also Boon, 'Introduction', 15.

62 Margarete Hubrath, 'The *Liber specialis gratiae* as a Collective work of Several Nuns', *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 11 (1999), 233-244.

63 The form of prophetic preaching identified by Gabriella Zarri in Italian convents of the period coincides with Juana's; see her 'Places and Gestures of Women's Preaching in Quattro- and Cinquecento Italy', in: *Charisma and Religious Authority: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Preaching, 1200-1500*, ed. Katherine L. Jansen and Miri Rubin (Turnhout, Brepols: 2010), 177-193.

64 Ibidem, 186.

65 On the *scrittura comunitaria*, see Gabriella Zarri, 'La scrittura monastica', in: *Letras en la celda. Cultura escrita de los conventos femeninos en la España moderna*, ed. Nieves Baranda Leturio and María del Carmen Marín Pina (Madrid-Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana-Vervuert, 2014), 53-54.

drafting, editing, copying, ordering and codification of oral performances that could apply to Juana's case.⁶⁶ Comparisons provide us with a silent, untold context, which, when combined with textual analysis, could give us richer insights into and understanding of what the abbess said, or may have said. Once collective authorship is accepted, the next stage is to try and understand how group work of this kind developed in the convent of Santa María de la Cruz during Juana's lifetime and afterwards.

When reflecting on this, we should also bear in mind that the sermons collected in the *Conorte* are very different in terms of form and length. Regarding length, for instance, some pieces in the Vatican Codex, such as the sermon 'Santa fe católica, ley de la Trinidad',⁶⁷ are very short and provide a marked contrast to the longer ones (such as the eighteen folios or so of the sermon on the Resurrection of the Lord).⁶⁸ Such variations must surely point, in the first place, to some kind of process of sifting through the contents of the material actually preached and second, to the transformative process of transcription and later copying, in which the contents were selected and rearranged in a new order. Some of the shorter sermons in the book could be considered as corroborations of this. Take sermon 31, for example, which the transcriber (or transcribers) claims to be a summary of seven sermons preached on different days of the week.⁶⁹ This explicitly stated manipulation of the text should lead us to suspect that, in most cases, some unspecified intervention may have affected the collection as a whole, especially the ordering of the sermons according to the liturgical calendar. A major change concerning the general ordering, for example, might be due to the amalgamation and rearrangement of sermons preached on the same feast day, but in different years. This would affect our appreciation of

66 See for example, Thomas Mertens, 'Ghostwriting Sisters: The Preservation of Dutch Sermons of Father Confessors in the Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Century', in: *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200-1600*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 121-141; Patricia Stoop, 'Nun's Literacy in Sixteenth-Century Convent Sermons from the Cistercian Abbey of Ter Kameren', in: *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue*, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 185-195, and Idem, 'Female Authorship in the Augustinian Convent of Jericho and the Translation of Conrad of Saxony's *Speculum Beatae Mariae Virginis* in Sermons by Maria van Pee and Janne Colijns', *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 42:2 (2016), 248-268.

67 Vatican codex, 407v-409v.

68 Vatican codex, 294v-312v.

69 Vatican codex, 427v-429v. To be more precise, at the beginning of the sermon, the transcribing nun states: '[I] summarize some of them here ('escribo aquí en breve algunos de ellos')'.

the contents of the particular liturgical cycle, because the apparent homogeneity of the *Conorte* gives the impression that the sermons were preached in the course of 1509, whereas it was impossible, for many reasons, for the collection to reflect only that one year.⁷⁰

Conclusion

I would like to say by way of conclusion that the survival of a corpus of more of seventy sermons by Juana de la Cruz is such a truly rare phenomenon, not only in the Kingdom of Castile but also at the European level, that it deserves a complete reappraisal. The key issue outlined in this article is the pressing need to re-examine the extant documents, regardless of certain modern attempts, associated with the reopening of the canonization cause, to prove or disprove the *authenticity* and *originality* of the written words. The main conclusion arising from my summary of the process for canonization presented here is that 'Juana's writings' became a major stumbling-block in her canonization process after 1665 and that the need to validate them became a matter of urgency. As stated, in the eighteenth century, the postulators argued that the sermons were not the originals, written, dictated, or even authored by Juana, and so could not be affected by Urban III's decretals. The promoters of the faith stated that it was necessary to find the hypothetical original of the *Conorte*, which blocked the cause until it was reopened in the twentieth century, thereby determining our use and understanding of the sermons. The desperate search for an *original* however was the only way to unblock the cause.

A necessary conclusion arising from the foregoing is that the status of these two codices in the history of Juana's sermons is far from clear. At this stage of my research, one of the essential questions is what should be regarded as 'the original' in a collection of sermons that has unquestionably been heavily tampered with by a community of nuns, and when written codification of preaching involves the memorizing, writing, copyediting, and organization of the materials. The final products of these performative

70 The sources generally agree on the duration of Juana's preaching activity, although the information about the dates and methods of composition of the *Conorte* is inconsistent, which is a question that requires a closer examination that I am unable to undertake here. For 1509 as the date of redaction, see Boon, 'Introduction', 16, n. 59.

metamorphoses conceal multi-layered, multi-authored re-creations that tend to be perceived by later users as a single unit, or, as in this case, two different versions of a liturgically ordered book of sermons. Therefore, if we want to look at the *Conorte* from the correct philological perspective, we should go back to the eighteenth-century arguments of the promoters of the faith and consider it as a sermon collection that was compiled following an imprecise, largely unknown method of transcribing and organizing the materials. Due to the lack of surviving codices from the convent library, apart from the Vatican manuscript, we do not have the possibility of studying scribal practices within the convent walls in any depth. Nevertheless, we can compare what we do know about the making of the *Conorte* with similar European communities of nuns in Europe contemporary to Juana de la Cruz and her community.

Finally, apart from a few exceptions such as Surtz and Boon, interpretations of Juana's sermons have – especially since the publication of the 1999 edition by García Andrés – generally used the text of just one of the surviving codices: the El Escorial manuscript. In the case of the *Conorte*, this means interpreting a single version of two quite dissimilar texts and assuming that the Vatican copy is the least reliable of the two. In my view, an essential preliminary step has been missed: gaining an understanding of the status of the Vatican manuscript and its countless variations in the history of the transmission of the sermons. In order to clarify this issue – at least to some extent – we should return to a material analysis of the sources and make further efforts to open up access to the second version of Juana's sermons to scholars. This is only possible through a critical edition or a complete collation, which includes a comparison of both texts, and which I will undertake in the near future.