

Impact of spanish colonial missions: a closer look of mission san lorenzo de la s...



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Impact of Spanish Colonial Missions: A Closer Look of Mission San Lorenzo de la Santa Cruz

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the history of Spanish Colonial Missions in Texas in order to gain a better understanding of Mission San Lorenzo de la Santa Cruz. Spanish Colonial missions in Texas have a rich archaeological and ethnohistorical record that provide insight to daily lives of missions as well as the long-term processes of the Spanish government on the North American continent. The Spanish government funded mission projects in order to spread Catholicism as well as adopt the Native Americans into Spanish, tax-paying citizens of the crown. What makes Mission San Lorenzo unique to other missions is that it was not approved by the Spanish government nor was it funded. This unauthorized mission was mostly funded personally by Captain Felipe de Rábago y Terán, as well as

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receiving supplies from other nearby missions [Castañeda 1976]. The majority of this paper will highlight the similarities and differences that Spanish missions in Texas faced, compared to Mission San Lorenzo. As of the present day, only one major archaeological investigation has researched Mission San Lorenzo. In the summer of 2017, a fresh dig will spark new research questions and focus on previously unexcavated areas. The latest dig will pay special attention to the excavation of middens, as well as digging in the central plaza area.

Spanish Colonial Missions in Texas

The history of Spanish influence in North America, is a long and rich history. Spanish explorers and conquistadors first discovered the islands in the east, like Cuba, as well as areas in modern South America and Mexico. Generally, most people associate Christopher Columbus's voyage in 1492 with the first contact with North America. However, it was "...Ponce de León [who] first touch Florida in 1513, formally opening the history of Spain on the North American continent," [Chipman 1992: 23]. Mission efforts were made in Florida, just like Texas and California. Credit to the "discovery" of Texas, however, lies with Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca. It was the unfortunate Cabeza de Vaca that involuntarily explored a vast area of North America and was the first to observe or describe the buffalo [Heusinger 1936: 2]. The next famous explorer of Texas, Francisco Vasquez de Coronado, was very interested in Texas to find the seven cities of Cibola. Coronado and his party marched aimlessly through modern day Texas, sometimes being led astray by Native Americans pointing him away from Tiguex [Heusinger 1936: 9]. Ultimately, Coronado failed to find the mythical seven cities of gold and

returned to Mexico in defeat. These first explorations in the 1500's were interested in mapping the land as well as mining for silver and gold. The missionary efforts did not start until years later. The first missionary efforts in Texas began for multiple reasons. The missionary efforts were combined with permanent settlement goals, as well as holding the French threat at bay. Spain did not consider colonizing Texas during the original explorations, since the goal was to map the new lands as well as discover gold and precious minerals. It was not until 1689 that the Spanish crown considered colonizing Texas, since the French settlement on the Gulf Coast posed a threat to the Spanish [Wade 2008: 108]. Spain worried that the French would claim more territory, as well as disrupt any trade the Spanish had with the local Native Americans. The French threat the worried Spain was La Salle accidentally landing his fleet in Matagorda Bay, in Spanish territory, instead of in the mouth of the Mississippi River [John 1975: 163]. Spain viewed this as an invasion and began to make plans to hold the territory. La Salle and his colony attempted to establish a settlement where they landed, but were ill-equipped to handle the environment. In an attempt to return to the Mississippi, La Salle was murdered by his own men and his colonists faced a deadly epidemic [John 1975: 163]. After this tragic affair, the French were no longer interested in the Mississippian region and focused on competing in trade against Great Britain. The Spanish did find what was left of the failed settlement in 1689 during their settlement in East Texas.

Chipman best describes the missionary effort, "...as dual aims of church and state. Their most obvious function was to save the souls of Indians, but they also assisted civilian settlements and presidios in extending and holding the

frontier,” [Chipman 1992: 248]. The push toward permanent settlement in Texas was a driving force for the viceroy to urge missionary friars with the hope of converting Native Americans. However, the viceroy was not only sending friars to settle the area, they were accompanied by soldiers. It was the duty of the soldiers to aid the missionary efforts to enforce, “...allegiance to the political interests of the mother country,” [McCaleb 1961: 30]. The friars and the soldiers worked hand in hand to ensure that loyalties to the Spanish crown were maintained, the territory occupied remained in Spanish ownership, and that the local communities would convert to a Spanish lifestyle that included practicing Catholicism. It was not enough to simply set up missions in claimed territory, the viceroy had to select advantageous locations that would keep the French at bay, as well as have enough local life for the friars to convert and live in the missions. The area most in need of warding off the French, was in modern day East Texas near La Salle’s previous settlement. Near this region was also a local group of Native Americans, named the Tejas by the Spanish, and were, “...the strongest and most influential Indians between the Río Grande and the Red River,” [Chipman 1992: 113]. The goal the Spanish hoped to achieve with the Tejas was to convert the Tejas, which could cause a spark for weaker tribes to accept Spanish rule and convert to Catholicism. The plan was in Spain’s best interest since it covered the issue of permanent settlement to hold territory, as well as save souls through the Tejas. The friars marched out of Mexico with the aid of soldiers toward East Texas with the hopes of converting many souls. The friars were apparently very resilient to the harsh conditions as, “No land was too remote, no savage too wild, to stay the march of the friars,” [McCaleb 1961: 30].

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The original missions in East Texas failed and were abandoned in the 1690s. It wasn't until a few years later that Fray Hidalgo went against the national interest of Spain by inviting the French to trade with the Caddo within Spanish territory [John 1975: 205]. Instead of punishing Fray Hidalgo, Spanish officials opted to reinstate the presidio and mission effort to hold the frontier. Learning their lessons from the previous failures, Frays and Spanish officials felt confident in their endeavors. The missions were set up closely to the previously failed ones and were again, "...far removed from San Juan Bautista, the nearest Spanish settlement," [Chipman 1992: 113]. They were isolated from near by help, and were very much on their own. However, their soldiers and the missionaries understood permanent settlement was in the best interests of Spain.

Life on the the frontier was not an easy one for the Spanish. The missionaries and soldiers fought may up hill battles against Indian attacks and raids, severe weather conditions, isolation from mother country, and epidemics of smallpox.

History of Mission San Lorenzo de la Santa Cruz

Excavation Techniques of Middens. The pervious excavation at Mission San Lorenzo focused mainly on the architecture of the mission as well as a few burials found. Tunnell found an enormous amount of material culture within the site without fully excavating the central plaza or the mission middens. The middens, however, underwent several tests, "...to determine their content, thickness, and extent," [Tunnell 1969: 5]. Within these tests, large quantities of Spanish artifacts were found. The purpose of gathering a larger sample size in the middens is to answer new questions for the latest

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excavation. Middens were very common during the Spanish-colonial and Mexican-era for all the members of the mission or presidio to dispose of refuse [Voss 2008: 139]. By gathering a large sample of the midden in the upper Northwest corner outside the living quarters and kitchen, and the midden in the Southwestern corner correlated with the bastion, a comparative analysis can be made between the two locations. The midden located by the possible bastion was identified as the primary trash midden for the mission, with its occupants throwing trash from top of the bastion down to the midden [Tunnell 1969: 31]. According to Tunnell, the living quarters in structures eleven and twelve were most likely occupied by Native American families. The middens can be excavated and analyzed apart from each other, but it would be beneficial to take in to account the two middens and their locations.

Analyzing the midden most likely related to the Native Americans can focus on questions regarding integration into mission life as well as food ways. The midden next to the bastion is the primary mission midden that contained both Spanish and Native American artifacts as well as other food items. This midden can bring a closer look in to the general way of life at the mission, food ways, as well as a comparative look between the Native American residents and the mission soldiers. Analyzing the primary mission midden would give insight to the supplies used at the mission. The issues of supplies are important since the mission was unauthorized by the Spanish government and was mostly funded by Rábago himself. Rábago continuously pulled man power and supplies from the Presidio San Sabá as well as the missions at San Antonio to provide for the members at the mission. The

artifacts in the midden could show similarities to artifacts from San Sabá and the missions at San Antonio, creating the direct link to Rábago. What would be interesting to discover is that if all of the artifacts are the usual assemblage of other authorized Spanish missions, or if supplies were limited and there was an abundance of makeshift supplies or traditional Native American assemblages. The previous excavation did find a large amount of Spanish artifacts that included gunflints, metal artifacts, and glassware, however, these excavations were limited and did not extend inside the plaza or middens. The primary function of the excavation was to expose the four corners of the mission, and expose the architectural features. The future excavation of Mission San Lorenzo will collect a large sample from both middens to compare and contrast materials found and their context.

While excavations in other areas of the mission will be beneficial, the analyzation of the middens will give greater insight to the overall state of the mission. Voss explains that, “ The greatest interpretive asset of middens is their association with a community group rather than with individuals or households,” [Voss 2008: 140]. The ideal focus of the midden excavations will be to make interpretations of the mission on a large scale, rather than attempt to narrow findings to individuals. What is unique about Mission San Lorenzo, is the fact that there are at least two middens on the perimeter of the mission. One close to Spanish soldiers and the bastion, and the other near the Native American living quarters. The goal is to analyze the community as a whole, but the differences between the two middens should definitely be noted and compared. While, “...middens present the dominant trends in material and dietary practices within the community as a whole,”

the different middens might show different trends depending on location [Voss 2008: 140]. The midden next to Structure 7, may either give a representation of the whole community, since it was the main midden, or more of a depiction of the soldiers and missionaries life ways. The midden outside the Native American living quarters may give insight to Native American life ways inside the mission, and possible food ways since the kitchen is close by. Depending on the success of the excavation, the midden could contain an abundance traditional Spanish-colonial assemblage, evidence of assimilating into missionary life, or a mixture of Traditional Lipan-Apache assemblage, illustrating the retainment their cultural identity.

The methods of the excavation will be ran very systematically. At minimum, two units in each midden will be opened, at total of four 2x2 units for excavation. To keep analysis percentages simple, each midden will contain the same amount of units. If the primary midden requires a third unit opened for investigation, then a third unit will also open in the second midden. The ideal goal with the findings in the midden deposits, would be to follow suit with Tennis's analysis and compare, "...types and frequencies of materials recovered from the main analytical units, Feature 1, Feature 2, and the non-feature units, reveals evidence of technological and socioeconomic changes," [Tennis 2002: 137]. Finding great change within the middens may prove difficult since the mission was occupied for less than ten years.

However, dietary analysis can be made as well as a comparison of material culture to other authorized missions. The levels will start at 10cm and will decrease to 5cm if the material culture is heavy and more detailed records are needed to be kept. Middens can be identified as, "...independent of a

habitation site or an integral part of it. If they are part of a habitation site, they may be considered a feature rather than a standalone site," [Burke et. al 2009: 249]. For Mission San Lorenzo, the middens will be identified as features of the site and not separate sites of the mission. Determining the dimensions of each midden, as well as the depth, would be extremely useful for comparison [Burke et. al 2009: 249]. Ideally, a profile of the stratigraphy in the midden would be taken. However, it may take longer than one dig season to reach the bottom of the midden to gather a full profile view. It is suggested to return to Mission San Lorenzo several times to gather a large sample.

Along with excavations, GIS transit equipment to remap the site. One goal with the remapping will be to create an accurate topographical map with in conjunction with the layout the perimeter of the mission. Understanding the typography of the site could also explain why the middens were placed in their locations. Having a midden next to next to kitchen area is sensible, since it would be easier to throwaway food trash close by. However, the midden next to Structure 7 is problematic since, "...the predominant South Westerly wind, this seem to have been an unfortunate choice of direction for trash disposal," [Tunnell 1969: 31]. Perhaps the midden was placed in its location to stray away from the church and gate areas. In general, the directional set up of the mission seems poorly planed, since the bastion did not face North to spot incoming Comanche attacks. Some Spanish-colonial presidio or mission sites utilize borrow pits for middens, "...which had been excavated in order to harvest clay soil for adobe brick and ceramic tile production, a typical practice in Spanish-colonial settlements," [Voss 2008:

140]. The area next to the bastion may be rich in clay soil used to create the floors or bricks for the mission. The cross section of Burial One displays a thin layer of a adobe floor with clay compacted in between [Tunnell 1969: 20]. The bedrock at the location is a rotten limestone that allows about 2. 5 feet of depth to dig.

The issue of the bedrock may indicate that the mission residents did not dig middens. Tunnell noted that around Structure 7 the trash mounded up against the walls on the outside perimeter [Tunnell 1969: 28]. If the middens were dug into the ground, the waste would most likely not build up against the wall. Turner explains in his report that, “ the midden deposits might be thicker nearer the wall. These findings challenge the idea that pits were dug for trash disposal,” [Turner 1988: 23]. Excavations and new mapping through the use of GIS equipment can allow a reasonable explanation for the location of the middens and their primary purpose. Through the analysis of the two middens, questions of diet, material culture, and changes in technology can be compared between the middens and to other authorized missions. The purpose of comparing to authorized missions, is to discover how Mission San Lorenzo survived for almost ten years with out Spanish government help, since other authorized missions relied on the crown to supply funds.

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