Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá Case Study

SPANISH COLONIZATION


SUMMARY

Texas has a rich archeological record with deep connections to Spanish missions and presidios. One mission in particular, Santa Cruz de San Sabá, presents an interesting case study of mid- to late-Spanish colonization attempts and the strategies that archeologists use to investigate that evidence. Using primary and secondary documents, students will investigate what happened at Mission San Sabá on March 6, 1758, and reflect on current archeological discoveries at that site.

OBJECTIVE(S):

- Analyze primary source documents, maps, artifact images, and recorded testimonials to build context around Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá and the events which led to its demise.
- Demonstrate their understanding of the evidence through oral presentation.

GUIDING QUESTION

- What were archeologists able to learn about the events which took place at Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá by examining primary and secondary sources?

VOCABULARY

mission (MISH-uh n): A Spanish Colonial settlement for Christianizing the Native Americans of a region; the settlement included a mission church and Indian quarters.

presidio (pruh-SID-ee-oh): The Spanish word for fort; the surviving Spanish forts in Texas are still called presidios.

excavate (eks-kuh-VAYT): In archeology, to excavate means to investigate a site through a careful, scientific digging process.

artifact (ar-tuh-FAKT): Any object that was made by a human. For example, an arrow-point or a clay pot.
Project the painting of Mission San Sabá found on the first page of this document. Ask students to record observations about what they see in the painting.

Conduct a short Q/A session with your students. Think about the following questions:

- What do you notice about the setting?
- What specific actions are taking place?
- Who might have painted this and for what reason?
- Who might the people be?
- What message does the painting send?

**WHOLE GROUP INSTRUCTION**

As a class, discuss students’ predictions before reading about the painting and the battle. The following resources provide some historical context:

1) Module 13: Spanish Colonization 1690-1821
2) [TSHA Handbook of Texas](#)

When using the TSHA handbook, you may want to adjust the reading level of the text with online resources such as [Rewordify](#).

**SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION**

Divide class into small groups. Have each group analyze four sets of data that provide context to the events which led to the destruction of the mission.

Distribute Mission San Sabá Guided Questions and allow groups 15-20 minutes to answer the questions and discuss the resources.
TEXAS ARCHEOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM: Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá Case Study

STATION 1: The Supplies Inventory
Students will use Document A and Document B to create categories for the types of items that were brought on the original expedition to found Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá.

STATION 2: Chronology of Events/Map of Expedition
Students will use Document C and Document D to explore the challenges the expedition faced.

STATION 3: Testimonials
Students will use Document E to discuss what the Spanish were saying directly after the event took place.

STATION 4: Spanish Artifacts
Students will use Document F to discuss how archeologists use artifacts to add context to past events.

RESOURCES
1) San Sabá guided questions
2) Document A: Supplies Inventory (English)
3) Document B: First Page of Supplies Inventory (Spanish)
4) Document C: Chronology of Events
5) Document D: Map of the Expedition
6) Document E: Testimonials
7) Document F: Spanish Artifacts

Above: Presidio San Sabá was built a few miles downstream from Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá. The mission’s purpose was to Christianize the Lipan Apache.

When using the TSHA handbook, you may want to adjust the reading level of the text with online resources such as Rewordify.
TEXAS ARCHEOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM: Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá Case Study

Meet the Archeologist

Behind the Lesson

Jenny McWilliams always knew she would explore the world. During her childhood, she recalls spending hours with her mother, a photographer for Texas A&M University’s Archeology department, admiring photographs of Texas history artifacts. Determined to travel the world and work outdoors, Jenny majored in anthropology at Texas State University and received her master’s degree in archeology at Texas Tech University. It was at Texas Tech that she had the unique opportunity to excavate and analyze artifacts and historical papers at Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá. Five years later, Jenny directed additional excavations of San Sabá while working with Prewitt and Associates, Inc. Her published works about San Sabá provide the majority of resources for this lesson. Currently, Jenny is sharing her expertise and passion for preservation with the Texas Historical Commission, serving as the Cemetery Preservation Program Coordinator.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Ask groups to return to their original station and review the answers to that station’s questions. Have groups discuss the following and be prepared to present their conclusion to the class.

What does your station’s evidence tell us about what happened at San Sabá?

Ask members from each group to present their answer to the above question and which resource they used to support their observations. Students should use their guided question answers.

EXIT TICKET/REFLECTION

Ask students to answer the following questions before they leave:

Describe some of the ways archeologist find clues to past events?

Why might it be difficult for archeologists and historians to understand everything that happens in our past?

Above: This mural is located on the north wall of the Mission Theater in downtown Menard and depicts an artist’s conception of life in the 1760s at Presidio San Sabá, the companion to Mission San Sabá.
SAN SABÁ GUIDED QUESTIONS
STATION 1: Supplies Inventory
Read Document A which contains many of the supplies that were brought on the expedition. Create categories for the types of supplies which were brought. One example is “cooking supplies.” What other supply categories do you see in the document? List as many supplies as you can in each category you create.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF CATEGORY</th>
<th>LIST OF SUPPLIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cooking Supplies</td>
<td>• 4 copper spoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 4 large copper jars</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1) What type of activities were the missionaries carrying out at San Sabá? Give a specific example.

2) What were you surprised to find on the list? Were there any items you thought should be on the list but were not?

3) You are planning a weekend camping trip with your family for seven days. Name the top five items that you would bring on your trip.

4) What do you think are the top five most important items on the expedition’s trip?
STATION 2: Chronology of Events/Map
Read the chart showing dates and the events which occurred there. Also review the map.

1) How many stops did the expedition take on their journey? In which cities or towns did the expedition stop?

2) Find the date when the mission left Querétaro. How long did it take to travel to Texas and begin construction on the mission at San Sabá?

3) What types of challenges did the expedition face along the way? Give specific dates.

4) How does building a chronology help archeologists tell the story of a past event?
STATION 3: Testimonials
Read all five testimonials then answer the questions below.

5) What do all testimony writers have in common?

6) What are details of the attack that we can learn from reading the testimonials?

7) Is there a testimonial that is different from the painting in any way? How so?

8) Why do you think the Native American point of view is not available for archeologists to consider?

9) Put yourself in the shoes of the “attacking indios” described by Joseph Vasquez. What might you have to say about the attack?
10) What is the smallest artifact and what is its approximate length? What is the largest artifact and its approximate length?

11) Which artifact do you think was the most important to the daily life of someone living at Mission San Sabá? Why?

12) Are any of these artifacts found on the supply list at station 1?

13) How can analyzing artifacts help archeologists tell the story of what happened at San Sabá?
DOCUMENT A: Supplies Inventory

100 one-piece comales [large flat griddles for cooking tortillas]
4 copper spoons
2 dozen needles for stringing chiles
4 large copper jars
2 sheets for the infirmary
2 lanterns
21 pounds of blue agave thread
2 knife boxes packed with scissors, combs, mirrors, and bags with 12 knives in each
2 dozen pocket scissors
270 blankets for the Indians
Half a pound of matches
1 dozen pocket knives
4 small basins of tinned copper for the Padres [priests]
2 handsaw blades
4 chisels
24 locks for heavy doors
10 double, heavy iron nails
2 rolls of metal cloth or sheeting for indios
200 repair nails for metal plates

10 small nails for floors
12 dozen cords to tie animals together
3 pairs of spurs
2 knives for killing cattle
1 barrel of water for animal drivers
12 pairs of shoes and 10 sandals
9 pairs of cordovan boots
2 pairs of trousers for Padres
Two young Apache chiefs
58 pairs of trousers, make for the Apache indios
100 pieces of Chinese ribbon
6 pounds of silk
2 small cushions for the padres
2 small metal bells
1 iron small trunk for Padre Jimenez
50 pieces of canvas for a camping tents
12 bunches of glass beads, green and blue
300 women's blouses
24 dozen small bells
18 rings set with stones of Bohemia for the Indian princes

DOCUMENT B: First Page of Supplies Inventory (English translation)

Report of the materials bought in Mexico City, for the act of founding Missions for the Aforementioned Gentile Apaches, and the expenses to enable the priest [to carry out this work]; what they were, and their prices, are the following:

First: for 8 cassimeres: 2 bivalves or sea shells used for baptizing: 4 small bells and 4 plates and altar cruets, which weighted 16 marcos, 1 ounce, 2 octavas, according to the accounting of the Maestro, at 10 p. per marco 161:4 1/2
For 2 ciboriums: 2 chalices: 8 altar cruets: 2 round discs, and two golden and white fabric to place over chalice during mass, which weighted 26 marcos, 5 and 1/4 octavas at 14 per marco 383:0
White Sacristy Cloth
6 Albs [white priest's gown] of brabant [fine white linen], good quality with lace
6 habits of fine linen, good quality with lace
6 altar cloths, of fine brabant with lace
6 double altar linens of fine linen
6 altar cloths of fine linen
6 covers for chalices and ciboriums [large sacred cups] of fine linen

6 of the same for patens [dishes for eucharistic bread]
6 small cloths for altar cruets [vessels in which wine and water are served at the altar]
6 purifiers [cloths with which the priest wipes the chalice]
8 chalice and paten cloths or palls
2 lustrous ribbons, for the habits, and 4 cords for tying the priests' albs, which with workmanship, lace and silk all cost 198:5
4 missals [mass books] with [either ribbon book mark or covered in cloth] and silk at 20p., 4 r. 82:0
2 missal stands, laquered and polished with gold plating 9:0
2 large cross in three pieces and gilded candlesticks with sockets of brass, packed in three parts 24:4
2 Roman Rituals at 5 p. 10:0
1 Montenegro book 6:0
2 notebooks or account books 5:0
12 large metal candlesticks at 20 r.15:01
2 small metal bells 1:2

888:7 1/2
Memoria de los gremios comprados en México para clásico
dela fundación de las Misiones de los Geniales Españoles para
avistar los eclecios en México, que los que se entienden con
los siguientes

Primero: por 8 cuartos: 2 corches para bapto.

Z: acompañando 3 pliegos que pesan 16 orugas.

X: 2 ochoavos que pesan 80 dorados.

Pr: 2 corches: 2 calices: 8 vinagres: 2 xeladas, y 10 piezas de dorado, blanco, que pesan 26 con 56 ochoavos.

Ropas blancas & nazareñas

6. Rellenar de sábanas, frote sin encama

6. Angos debetado sin encama

6. Manoletes de sábanas, sin encama

6. Cojines de cubierta

6. Manoletes debetado

6. Currinim de calices, y copones de bataría

6. Unas volantes

6. Princo & Vinagre

6. Pecijades

8. Vajillas de calices, y panecas

2 pliages de lieston batido, para los angos, y del copones

Que con luchas, encama, y se importó todo

4. Alféizares con Recimientos y pesan 80 dorados

2. Ardeis marrones, y pliegos de sábanas

2. Tornos de cojines y fiones de dorados con encama, que llenan de sábanas para encama

1. Líneas de libra de sábanas

1. Articles de 20 sábanas

1. Artículos de 70 sábanas

1. Camarillas de marrones, con 80 sábanas

0.09 89.72
### Document C: Chronology of Events

#### Table 14.1. Chronology of key events pertaining to the Inventory of Supplies and the San Sabá Missions Expedition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE(S)</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
<th>REFERENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 24, 1756</td>
<td>The “council” issued a final decree accepting the terms of the offer from Don Pedro Terreros fund a mission on the San Saba River.</td>
<td>Dunn 1914:388–391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After August 24, 1756</td>
<td>After having gathered supplies for an unknown length of time, the San Sabá Missions expedition left Mexico City.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 4, 1756</td>
<td>Father Terreros received his formal appointment as president of the new missions to be established on the San Saba.</td>
<td>Dunn 1914:391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 18, 1756</td>
<td>The friars and supply train for the San Sabá Missions expedition arrived in Querétaro on September 18, 1856.</td>
<td>Appendix B; Dennis 1955a:74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 13, 1756</td>
<td>Colonel Ortiz Parrilla left Mexico City.</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 20, 1756</td>
<td>Colonel Ortiz Parrilla arrived in Querétaro.</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 29, 1756</td>
<td>Father Trinidad bought “twenty-one mules with harnesses and a quantity of corn” in Saltillo.</td>
<td>Weddle 1964:44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1, 1756</td>
<td>Colonel Ortiz Parrilla arrived in Monclova on December 1, then San Juan Bautista a “few days later.”</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 14, 1756</td>
<td>The friars and the supply train arrive in San Antonio.</td>
<td>Weddle 1964:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 22, 1756</td>
<td>Colonel Ortiz Parrilla arrived in San Antonio.</td>
<td>Dunn 1914:391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between December 1756 and March 1757</td>
<td>The expedition stayed in San Antonio. The supplies were originally stored at Mission Valero until Father Dolores forced them to be moved to Mission Concepción.</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:396; Dunn 1914:391–395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By March, 1757</td>
<td>The expedition gathered 1,400 cattle and 700 sheep in San Antonio along with many “other supplies…”</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By March, 1757</td>
<td>The expedition left San Antonio and stayed at a temporary camp on the San Marcos River.</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 9, 1757</td>
<td>Four “prospectors were attacked by indios on the Pedernales and forced to flee for refuge at the presidio.”</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 9, 1757</td>
<td>The expedition left San Marcos and, rather than going directly to San Sabá, returned to San Antonio before heading out for San Sabá.</td>
<td>Dunn 1914:396–97; Castañeda 1936:397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 9, 1757</td>
<td>Colonel Ortiz Parrilla ordered 61 soldiers, the missionaries, and the Tlaxcaltecs to start the march from San Marcos to San Antonio, “leaving the greater part of the supplies gathered in the temporary camp [on the San Marcos] under guard of thirty-nine soldiers.”</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 18, 1757</td>
<td>The expedition reached the San Saba River on April 18, 1757. They immediately began work building the mission.</td>
<td>Dunn 1914:396–97; Castañeda 1936:397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 4, 1757</td>
<td>The mission was in operation. “By May 4 [1757], the work had progressed sufficiently for the commander to send instructions to the detachment on the San Marcos to bring up the rest of the supplies.”</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1757</td>
<td>By the middle of June [1757]…Three thousand Apache had unexpectedly camped near the new mission which was awaiting them.”</td>
<td>Castañeda 1936:398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November ?, 1757</td>
<td>Colonel Ortiz Parrilla signed and attested the Inventory of Supplies document. The day is not legible in the original handwritten document.</td>
<td>Appendix B; Dennis 1955a:74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After November ?, 1757</td>
<td>The Inventory of Supplies document is transferred from Mission San Saba sometime after November 1756, but it is not known when or where the document was sent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 16, 1758</td>
<td>Mission San Saba is attacked and destroyed by hostile indios.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 17, 1758</td>
<td>Parrilla and soldiers return to the mission to “reconnoiter the surrounding terrain and inspect the devastated mission.” They also collect all the useable items and make an inventory of the salvaged materials.</td>
<td>Nathan and Simpson 1969:55–56; Gilmore 1967:13, 37–43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 1768</td>
<td>Don Pedro Terreros is awarded the title of Conde de Regla as a reward for his “pious labors” in the attempt to establish Apache missions on the San Saba River.</td>
<td>Weddle 1964:41; White 2000:118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DOCUMENT D: Map of the Expedition

Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá and Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas
“The witnesses agreed that the cause of the outbreak was the protection we have extended to the Apaches, who are enemies of the Comanche, Texas, Vidaes, Yujuanes, Tancagues, and other nations from farther to the north.”

—Lieutenant Juan Galvan

“I myself presented four bundles [tobacco] to an Indian who never did dismount and whom the others acknowledged as their Great Chief. He was a Comanche, according to the barbarians themselves…”

—Father Fray Miguel de Molina

“They had “French firearms, bullet pouches, and very large powder horns…most of them had muskets and cutlasses.”

—Deposition of Joseph Gutiérrez, servant

“The attacking Indians “…must have numbered over 2,000” and “He [Vásquez] recognized their weapons as French muskets and lances.”

—Deposition of Joseph Vásquez

The “Great Chief…was a Comanche…His war dress and his red jacket were well decorated, after the manner of French uniforms, and he was fully armed...equipped with at least 1,000 firearms…”

—Father Fray Miguel de Molina

“In these documents it is made clear that the new Presidio of San Luis, as well as the Mission under its protection, was attacked by 2,000 Comanche Indians and other allied nations, equipped with firearms and apparently instigated by foreign political agents….This occurrence, your Excellency, besides the sorrow that such a disaster must bring us, ought to make us cautious on many points, for the Comanche Nation is warlike and well instructed in the use of firearms Through frequent communication with the French.”

—Letter to the Viceroy of Spain after the attack
**THE REDISCOVERY AND INVESTIGATION OF MISSION SAN SABÁ**

Imagine that you are tracing your family’s history and discover that you are a direct descendant of a Spanish soldier who survived a massacre at a Spanish mission in 1758. The mission, Santa Cruz de San Sabá, had been lost since it was burned down after the massacre. A San Antonio-based architect named Mark Wolfe found himself in that exact situation. He asked historian and archeologist Kay Hindes for help in locating the site of the lost mission. In 1993, they traveled to Menard, Texas, to begin the hunt for clues. Finding the actual mission site involved a lot of hard-work and a little luck! They were able to identify a general area for the mission’s location by studying Hindes’ recent work, earlier research done by Dr. Kathleen Gilmore, and by looking at aerial photos. In a recently plowed field, they found over 30 pieces of Spanish pottery, burned bone, and pieces of fired clay called *daub* which were remnants of the mission’s structures. Wolfe and Hindes were ecstatic that they might have found the lost mission. In 1993 and 1994, Texas Tech archeologist Dr. Grant Hall conducted excavations that confirmed that the site they located was indeed the long-lost mission of Santa Cruz de San Sabá.

In 2006, the Texas Department of Transportation widened FM 2092, a small county road that runs along the mission site. During this construction, Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted more excavations. Their findings helped explain the layout of the structures, stockade, and fortifications as well as the events that lead to the destruction of the mission. Archeologist Jenny McWilliams’ field work with Texas Tech University and her later work with Prewitt and Associates provided the evidence for this lesson and gives us a window into what life may have been like at Mission San Sabá. It took the combined work and collaboration of historians, professional archeologists, and even a person interested in his own family history to tell the story of San Sabá.

Known by archeologists as *snipe hinges*, these wires were nailed into wooden door frames and spread apart to lock them in place (Simmons and Turley, 1980). These snipe hinges are made of iron and are dated to the time when the mission existed. They were found near the outer wall of the mission itself.

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**DOCUMENT F: Spanish Artifacts**

![Figure 5.1](image)

Lot 4
Top View

Lot 4
Side View

Lot 266

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In 1993 and 1994, Texas Tech archeologist Dr. Grant Hall conducted excavations that confirmed that the site they located was indeed the long-lost mission of Santa Cruz de San Sabá. In 2006, the Texas Department of Transportation widened FM 2092, a small county road that runs along the mission site. During this construction, Prewitt and Associates, Inc., conducted more excavations. Their findings helped explain the layout of the structures, stockade, and fortifications as well as the events that lead to the destruction of the mission. Archeologist Jenny McWilliams’ field work with Texas Tech University and her later work with Prewitt and Associates provided the evidence for this lesson and gives us a window into what life may have been like at Mission San Sabá. It took the combined work and collaboration of historians, professional archeologists, and even a person interested in his own family history to tell the story of San Sabá.
This picture shows three *iron spikes* and six iron nails. Nineteen spikes were recovered from a Texas Tech University investigation at the mission. Two spikes from these investigations have diamond shapes and are thought to be for decoration.
These lead pieces are mostly scrap fragments used to make other items. Many times, lead like this could be melted and shaped into any shape, such as a musket ball for shooting. Most of these pieces were heated and probably melted when the mission was attacked and burned. As a result, they took on the shape of the surface or object where they melted.
The archeologists who discovered these olive jars noted the white coloring on the inside of the jars, which were very similar to jars made from 1570 to 1780 (Hall and Gilmore, 1995). Archeologists also noted that the black coloring on the bottom of the jars meant that they may have been used for cooking. Archeologists also conducted chemical tests, and found similarities between jars found at Mission San Sabá and jars found at another Texas mission site, Mission Dolores. This indicates that these missions may have had similar supply sources.
In Texas, these ceramics pieces are called Puebla Blue on White and they are most often pieces of plates, bowls, or cups. Often the decorations include dark blue images of flowers or a bird encircled by dots. The exact date and location of manufacturing are difficult to determine since very similar pieces are found throughout Mexico and Texas around this time period.

References Cited


