



Spanish plan of the Mission El Orcoquisac, circa 1760. (Courtesy Wallisville Heritage Park)

“El Orcoquisac” 1756-1771: The Mission Nuestra Señora de la Luz del Orcoquisac, the Presidio San Agustín de Ahumada, and the Rivalry between the Spanish and the French for the Indian Trade in Southeastern Texas

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The only Spanish mission and presidio (fort) in southeastern Texas was on the lower Trinity River just north of present Interstate Highway 10, approachable only by a trail south from the Nacogdoches area. One of the last mission complexes established in Texas, the tiny, remote outpost was forgotten and returned to nature after it was abandoned in the 1770s. Since they were not constructed with native rock, the wooden structures left little evidence of Spain's effort to control trade and convert the Orcoquisac, Bedais, and Attakapa Indians who occupied the area.

Texas was ignored by Spain because the early explorers found no gold or silver and only attracted notice when French adventurers intruded on Spanish land. Whenever word reached the authorities that foreigners threatened their hegemony, Spain dispatched missionaries and a few soldiers to establish a community as evidence of occupation. This practice began in Texas in the 1690s in response to LaSalle's colony on the waters of Matagorda Bay and continued for the next 80 years. When Spain gained French Louisiana in 1763 at the close of the Seven Years War, ending the longtime rivalry of the two countries in North America, Spain withdrew its frontier missions and presidios from eastern Texas to the San Antonio neighborhood. While Spain claimed most of North America west and south of the Mississippi River, the boundary between the province of Texas and Louisiana remained unresolved because France claimed Texas to a line north of LaSalle's fort.¹

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¹For a concise history of Spanish Texas for this period see Margaret Swett Henson, "Hispanic Texas, 1519-1836," in Donald W. Whisenhunt, ed., *Texas: A Sesquicentennial Celebration* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1984), 33-44.

Even the Texas Gulf Coast and its inviting harbors remained uncharted until 1785 when the Viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez sent José de Evía to sound the Texas coast. Evía named the bay and its prominent island for his patron, but Spain still did not open seaports between New Orleans and Veracruz because of its mercantile policy of limited access.²

French adventurers had explored Galveston Bay as early as 1719, calling it St. Bernard or St. Louis Bay, with some confusing it with Matagorda Bay. By the 1730s, French traders from Louisiana visited Indian villages on the San Jacinto and Trinity rivers, but it was not until 1754 that Spain took action against a trader who had established a post on the lower Trinity River.³

The two nations held differing views about trade and relations with the natives. Most Spaniards regarded merchants with contempt, favoring instead careers in the army or the Roman Catholic church. Nevertheless, the king sold trading monopolies in the New World to a select few who were limited to certain ports. Thus goods entering Mexico's only port at Veracruz had to travel long distances overland to reach the Texas frontier. Moreover, Spain favored placing Texas Indians under the care of Catholic missionaries who would civilize them and teach them to be productive good citizens. While Spain sincerely hoped to convert the natives to Christianity, establishing missions guarded by small presidios on the frontier was also a way to create villages with industrious Indian peons and married Spanish soldiers bringing their families. This plan worked well in the San Antonio and Goliad vicinities during the mid-1700s although the efforts around present-day Nacogdoches were less successful. Tribes that could not be lured into missions received annual gifts of clothing and food from the government, not from merchants. While sexual interactions occurred between soldiers and Indian women, marriage between Spaniards and the natives was discouraged by the authorities.

In contrast, the French in Louisiana forsook the influence of missionaries and relied on private enterprise to control the native population. Each trader

²"José de Evía," *The Handbook of Texas*, vol. 3 (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1952, 1976), 287.

³Henri Folmer, "De Bellisle on the Texas Coast," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 44 (October 1940): 208-225; Jean-Baptiste Benard de la Harpe, *The Historical Journal of the Establishment of the French in Louisiana*, trans. Joan Cain and Virginia Koenig (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1971), 177-181; for French claims to Galveston Bay and early trade see Ory to M. Perier, November 1, 1730, in Dunbar Rowland and A. G. Sanders, eds. & trans., *Mississippi Provincial Archives*, vol. 4 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1904 reprint), 48; Gov. Kerlerec to Minister, December 20, 1754, mentions a new map by Bellin printed 1749 showing St. Bernard Bay in French Territory, in Baron Marc de Villiers du Terraye, "Last Years of the French in Louisiana..." trans. typescript by Henri Delville de Suidar, W.P.A. Survey of Federal Archives of Louisiana, 1937-1938 (copy at Louisiana State Archives in U.S. Mint, New Orleans).

was licensed to trade and even live with certain tribes while the chiefs were encouraged to visit New Orleans to receive symbols of authority and to be impressed by civilization. The French exchanged blankets, woven material, kettles, guns, and trifles for animal skins, bear grease and tallow, pecans, and stolen Spanish livestock. The trader often had an Indian wife, which gave him influence and status with the tribe and allowed him to provide the French authorities with information about tribal activities. Needless to say, East Texas Indians preferred the trading opportunities with the French visitors to depending on the largess of the poorly supplied Spanish governor even after 1721, when the capital of Texas was moved from San Antonio to Los Adaes, a site almost 30 miles east of the Sabine River.

While the French penetrated both northeastern and southeastern Texas, the Spanish remained ignorant about everything southeast of the old road from San Antonio to Nacogdoches. In 1740, Governor Prudencio de Orobio Bazterra wrote from Los Adaes, "With respect to the rivers Colorado, Brazos de Dios, Trinidad and Sabinas, I only know...that they empty into the Gulf of Mexico, and that...[no]...exploration of any of this has been made." The next year, after repeated rumors about French traders visiting Galveston Bay, the governor urged Mexico City to place a presidio on the lower Trinity.⁴

But nothing was done and the frustrating experience of Captain Joaquín Orobio Bazterra, five years later, further illuminates this lack of information. The captain was stationed at La Bahía, located on the Guadalupe River seven miles below present-day Victoria. Learning that there was a French camp at the mouth of the Trinity River, his superiors ordered him in July 1745 to go "in all haste" and expel them. He started overland along the coast but failed because there was no trail through the marshes. Then he considered building canoes to descend the Guadalupe and paddle along the coast, but finally, on December 20, he started northeast with 21 soldiers over the road to Nacogdoches. He intended to go to the Trinity River crossing (which he reached on January 9, 1746) and then follow the river to its mouth. But when he discovered there was no trail along the Trinity and the only known route was south from Nacogdoches, he decided to confer with the governor at Los Adaes. From there, he returned to Nacogdoches on February 4 and, with the aid of guides, started southwest over the Bedais trail skirting the Big Thicket to the villages near the Trinity River about 30 to 40 miles below the Camino Real crossing. He was the first Spaniard to visit these Indian settlements. Orobio crossed to the west bank of the Trinity River and headed towards the

⁴Gov. Prudencio de Orobio Bazterra from Adaes to Father Santa Ana, president of missions at Bexar, July 8, 1740, in Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Texas in the Middle Eighteenth Century: Studies in Spanish Colonial History and Administration* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970 reprint, orig. published 1915), 63-64 n18.

Orcoquisac villages on the upper San Jacinto River and Spring Creek in northern Harris County, a distance of about 40 miles. When he was ready to return to La Bahía, Captain Orobio cut a new trail northwest to the Brazos River to find the La Bahía crossing and reached home on April 6.⁵

While in the villages, the captain persuaded the tribes to consider mission life and in 1747 some Orcoquisacs and Bidais entered San Xavier missions in Milam County northeast of modern Austin. However, they did not like mission life and soon left. Both tribes cultivated corn and other crops in permanent villages plus gathering wild fruit and berries in addition to fishing and hunting. The French traders tempted them with knives, scissors, combs, tobacco, and firearms which they eagerly exchanged for skins and pelts. This dependence on French merchandise forced the Spanish governor to deviate from tradition by sending Spanish agents disguised as traders to supply the southeastern tribes in order to maintain control.⁶

In 1750 the French increased the number of troops in Louisiana, which the Spanish interpreted as a threat to Texas. The viceroy ordered Spanish troops to make the French evacuate Natchitoches if any of their people ventured west of Los Adaes but, because of a temporary friendly alliance between France and Spain, there was to be no violence. At this same time, the Spanish noted an increasing number of French traders going up the Red River towards Spanish Santa Fe.⁷

By July 1751, the new governor at Los Adaes, Jacinto Barrios y Jáuregui, institutionalized Spanish trading in East Texas with himself as the merchant. A practical man whose philosophy must have been, "if you can't beat them, join them," he bought goods in French Natchitoches and used his troops to guard the pack trains carrying goods to the lower Trinity and San Jacinto rivers. Two of his officers participated in this illicit trading, Marcos Ruiz and interpreter Domingo del Rio, who would later be assigned to El Orcoquisac. In addition to the usual hides and tallow, the Orcoquisacs exchanged corn and livestock, the latter stolen from Spanish ranches. Governor Barrios used the corn and animals at Los Adaes and sold the skins in French Natchitoches, excusing his actions on the basis of need.⁸

Governor Barrios conferred with residents of Los Adaes to determine the historic boundary between French Louisiana and Spanish Texas. Most thought it was the Red River at Natchitoches but others favored the Arroyo Hondo near Los Adaes. When Governor Barrios tried to end French trading among tribes in Spanish Texas, some Indians resisted and threatened to expel the Spaniards. Alarmed by the anger his actions had aroused, Barrios warned

his superiors that, in case of a confrontation, the Indians would side with the French and massacre the Spaniards. Therefore, he urged building another presidio near the Trinity River. No help came; only orders for him to keep the French out of Texas and to prevent the return of any French who visited Texas or New Mexico. What saved the Spanish outpost from retaliation from the Indians was the intercession of Louis Juchereau de St. Denis the younger, the son of the founder of Natchitoches and absolute master of the frontier tribes, who calmed the tribes.⁹

Amid this turmoil, Joseph Blancpain, two associates, and two slaves arrived on the lower Trinity River by boat from New Orleans in July or August, 1754, to build a permanent trading post. The men wrested their sloop 10 miles up the twisting river aided by canoes or pirogues to a cutoff on the eastern bank leading to what is now known as Lake Miller. There, on the south shore of the lake, atop ancient shell middens, they erected three storage buildings and a small barracks plus a convenient wharf for unloading their goods. Blancpain, a native of Belgium, had traded with the eastern Attakapas in Louisiana for 25 years and also served as an interpreter for the French authorities. He had a trading house on the Red River and lived on a plantation 60 miles north of New Orleans. Blancpain's license from the governor of Louisiana allowed him to trade with the Houmas and Attakapas, and, should he meet new tribes, he was to invite their chiefs to New Orleans. Seemingly Blancpain's Attakapas, some of whom had villages at the mouth of the Neches, had introduced him to their Orcoquisac cousins.¹⁰

Chief Calzones Colorados ("Red Pants") of the Orcoquisac village near Blancpain's trading post had received his military coat, hat, and cane of authority from the Spanish governor and he quickly reported the arrival of the French traders to Los Adaes. Governor Barrios, acting not only as the Spanish authority but also in his personal interest as a trader, immediately dispatched Lieutenant Marcos Ruiz in September 1754 to seize the goods and arrest the French. The friendly Orcoquisacs would assist and be rewarded with Blancpain's merchandise and vessels. The unfortunate Frenchmen were arrested in October and sent overland to Mexico City where the Belgian died in custody while his two companions were sent to Spain for trial.¹¹

Learning that more French traders had recently visited Galveston Bay, Barrios acted defensively. In April 1755, he sent Sergeant Domingo del Rio with a few troops and barter goods to El Orcoquisac, the name given to the Indian village and the illegal French post, to win back the loyalty of Bidais

⁵Bolton, 64, 328-332.

⁶*Ibid.*, 65.

⁷*Ibid.*, 69.

⁸*Ibid.*, 65, 66, 337 based on his *residencia* (a formal accounting of actions).

⁹Bolton, 70-72.

¹⁰John V. Clay, *Spain and the Lower Trinity River* (Wallisville Heritage Park, 1987), 51; Bolton, 337, 338; William Louis Fullen, "El Orcoquisac Archeologic District, Wallisville Reservoir..." *Houston Archeological Society Newsletter* 59 (April 1978).

¹¹Bolton, 78, 338-339; Clay, 51.

chiefs Mateo and Tomás. The other major chief of the area, Canos of the Attakapas, had defected to the French and gone to New Orleans, where he received goods with which to bribe the other chieftains to join the French. The French governor sent a protest to Los Adaes over the arrest of Blancpain and the establishment of a garrison on the Trinity because he considered it part of French Louisiana.¹²

A new Spanish viceroy, Don Agustín de Ahumada Villalón Mendoza y Naváez, the Marqués de las Amarillas, reached Mexico City at the end of 1755. Among his first acts was to authorize the creation of a presidio and mission near the mouth of the Trinity on February 4, 1756. The plan called for 30 soldiers to be sent immediately to the site of Blancpain's trading post and a mission established as soon as possible staffed by two Franciscans from the College of Zacatecas. A permanent site would be chosen later to be settled with 50 families recruited from Texas or other provinces. After six years, the presidio would be closed with the soldiers and their families receiving nearby parcels of land to enhance the community.¹³

Within two months of the viceroy's order, soldiers for the new presidio, named San Agustín de Ahumada in honor of the viceroy (as was the one at San Sabá organized the following year and named San Luis de las Amarillas), were recruited from Los Adaes. Marcos Ruiz, now promoted to captain, and his associate, Domingo del Rio, upgraded to lieutenant, were in command. The troops took a cannon and perhaps two swivel guns from Los Adaes. By May 1756, almost two years after the abortive establishment of Blancpain's trading post, San Agustín's plaza de armas was ready within a wooden stockade with barracks around the walls.¹⁴

Elderly Father Bruno Chavira and young Father Marcos Satereyn arrived from Zacatecas in the fall of 1756 to begin the mission Nuestra Señora de la Luz del Orcoquisac. At first the Indians were very helpful and even the French-influenced Canos promised to move to the mission. They aided in planting the corn fields, the vegetable gardens, and by building corrals for the animals. The converts, living in villages outside of the mission proper, helped construct the wooden church which was plastered with clay and moss and whitewashed inside. A dwelling for the priests and a granary were completed by June 1757.¹⁵

The site, on the high ground south of Lake Miller, was surrounded by marshes and thus was very humid and a breeding place for mosquitos, flies, and other insects. Moreover, neither the lake water nor underground water proved palatable, being brackish and muddy. Everybody suffered with dysen-

¹²Bolton, 73, 340-341.

¹³*Ibid.*, 74, 346 n7.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 346-347.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 347-349.

tery and in June 1757, less than a year after his arrival, Father Chavira died and was buried in the mission cemetery along with several others. Chavira's aides panicked and fled to Los Adaes, abandoning their charges, until a replacement, Father José Francisco Caro, formerly of the mission Nuestra Señora de los Dolores de Ais (at present-day San Augustine), arrived. He immediately recognized the dangers of the unhealthy site and asked that the mission be moved soon or he would leave. A better location was discovered further up the Trinity River where the water was good; Governor Barrios inspected the new site later that year and ordered crops planted and a triangular stockade built. Nevertheless, for reasons unknown, his orders were never carried out and the presidio and mission remained on the lake.¹⁶

Two new missionaries arrived in 1758 and the following year Father Abad de Jesús María ordered the mission moved to higher ground just east of the lake. The new location was on a rise one-half mile east of the presidio and overlooked not only the fort but also the marshes. The priest reported that a prairie just east of the new site was big enough to plant corn for an even larger community. However, Father Abad complained that the lazy soldiers under the "incompetent" Del Rio would not help build the new mission. In spite of this lack of cooperation, the priest completed a substantial complex by 1759 including a plastered church with a four-arch covered walkway.¹⁷

Governor Barrios left Texas in 1759 to govern Coahuila and answer charges about his trading activities. His departure signaled the end to the much-needed but illicit Spanish trade in eastern Texas. His replacement, Don Ángel Martos y Navarrete, made plans to move the presidio and mission from El Orcoquisac to higher land on the Trinity, but after viewing the various sites he agreed it should remain at the lake as Father Abad wished. The new governor was beset with problems along the coast. There were rumors that the French had built a trading post at the mouth of the Brazos and, about the same time, the Attakapas and the Orcoquisas complained about the behavior of Spanish soldiers among their women. When a private killed an Indian, he was executed to appease Indian sensibilities.¹⁸

Supplies still arrived overland from Veracruz via Mexico City, San Antonio, and Los Adaes, and in 1763 the military commander at El Orcoquisac blamed Governor Martos for the lack of flour, clothing, and ammunition. Command of the outpost, he said, should be in the hands of a captain who would be responsible directly to the viceroy, not the governor. Such a change was already contemplated in Mexico City and, in May 1764, Captain Rafael

¹⁶Bolton, 74-78, 353.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 77-78, 355, 349.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 73, 355, 359-365.

Martínez Pacheco, who seemed to have excellent political connections at the highest level, arrived with authority from the viceroy.¹⁹

Unlike earlier commandants, Pacheco actively aided the two missionaries. With the aid of interpreter Del Rio, Pacheco assembled the 150 Orcoquisas under Calzones Colorados who lived nearby and urged them to move into the mission. In return for obeying the rules, working in the fields, and discarding their idols, they would receive weekly food rations and clothing. Most agreed to the terms, but after receiving their allotments none moved into the mission. On May 31, 1764, Canos and his Attakapas arrived carrying a French flag and agreed to enter the mission if they could live separately from Calzones. A week later, Tomás and 48 Bidais promised the same if a mission was located at their village near the headwaters of Spring Creek in present-day Grimes County. Earlier, Tomás had led his band to the San Xavier mission located on the San Gabriel River but had left. Pacheco asked the viceroy for funds to rebuild the decaying mission and presidio at El Orcoquisac and also to supply both Canos and Calzones with beef and corn each week. Evidently few Indians entered mission life, because the priests at Nuestra Señora de la Luz del Orcoquisac listed only 30 converts.²⁰ It appears that the Indians were more attracted to the food and clothing than to the religion.

While Pacheco was popular with the Indians and the missionaries, he was hated by his troops, who charged him with arrogance, harshness, and avarice. On June 24, 1764, the soldiers planned a mutiny, but it was interrupted by the month-long visit of Governor Martos and the president of the Franciscan College of Zacatecas, Father Calahorra. Instead, soldiers slipped away one by one to Natchitoches and sought protection from Pacheco's brutal punishments, leaving only Del Rio and four others at the presidio. Despite the transfer of Louisiana to Spain by the treaty of 1763, French officers remained in charge of Louisiana outposts until about 1769 when Spain belatedly sent replacements.²¹

The commander at Natchitoches sent the soldiers' complaints to Governor Martos at Los Adaes, 15 miles away, and on September 13, 1764, Martos suspended Pacheco and pardoned the deserters. He sent Marcos Ruiz at the head of the 20 deserters to arrest Pacheco. They arrived on October 7 and surprised Captain Pacheco, who was asleep in his quarters. He rushed to the door with his musket and denied that the governor had the authority to arrest him; he ordered Captain Ruiz to return at once to Los Adaes. Shots were exchanged and Ruiz withdrew from the fort. His old associate, Del Rio, arrived from across the river, where he and his four men had been looking for

¹⁹Bolton, 367-368.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 70, 365-366, 367.

²¹*Ibid.*, 368.

cattle, and he agreed to join Ruiz in carrying out the governor's order to arrest Captain Pacheco.²²

Del Rio asked Calzones to join them and the Orcoquisa chief tentatively agreed. Captain Pacheco remained barricaded in his quarters with his brother and three others guarding the windows with two cannon near the entrance. Captain Ruiz sent a message threatening to set fire to the building, but the note was returned unopened. One of the priests and a "maiden," Rosa Guerra, begged Pacheco to surrender but he refused. Four days later, on October 11, Ruiz delivered an ultimatum to which Pacheco replied with cannon and musket fire, killing three men. Ruiz ordered his troops to light torches and set fire to the wooden buildings under cover of gunfire from the presidial chapel and store. Although Pacheco himself did not appear, two of his supporters were wounded and were carried out from the blazing building along with the captain's ill brother. Meanwhile, Ruiz's men tried to put out the flames which had spread to the visitor's quarters and an empty barracks, destroying them. When the soldiers searched the ruins, they found that Pacheco and Brioso had escaped through a secret door in the chimney.²³

Pacheco made his way to San Antonio, where he sought refuge in the Mission San José but was finally arrested on orders from the governor. In December, he left under guard for Mexico City to stand trial but was finally exonerated four years later. Captain Ruiz took command of El Orcoquisac until November, when he was charged with burning the presidio and replaced by Afan de Rivera. As an illustration of the intricacies of Mexican politics, two years later, in 1767, Governor Martos was held accountable for Ruiz's act. The deposed governor's case continued for 14 years and resulted in a heavy fine.²⁴

The presidio was probably repaired although no later description of it exists. In September 1766, two years after the effort to arrest Captain Pacheco, a hurricane struck the lower Trinity River, severely damaging the mission. The priest reported that the mission church, the residence of the priests, and the kitchen were completely destroyed. Rebuilding was slow and almost two years later the priest reported that they had a plastered, shingled, and whitewashed church measuring 33 by 19 feet located within a square yard almost 60 by 60 feet. Inside the chapel was a raised altar with a railing, a pulpit, a floored and railed choir stall, a confessional, and a baptistry. The report also mentioned a kitchen, a cemetery, and the 63-foot-long priests' house with a hall and two cells, plastered and whitewashed inside, with a railed porch all around the outside.²⁵

²²Bolton, 369.

²³*Ibid.*, 270-272, 369-370.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 372, 373.

²⁵Clay, 71-72.

When the Marqués de Rubí inspected El Orcoquisac in October 1767, during his two-year tour to evaluate frontier outposts at the behest of the Spanish government, he found 31 cavalry men including officers and two Franciscans who ministered to both the troops and the local Indians. But no Indians lived in the mission. The marqués considered the site very unhealthy. In view of the dearth of converts and the lack of need to maintain a Spanish presence in southeastern Texas since Louisiana now belonged to Spain, he recommended closing the complex in the name of economy.²⁶

As usual, things moved slowly and El Orcoquisac was still in existence in the fall of 1769, when Captain Pacheco, now exonerated, resumed command. The missionaries and the Indians expected the same support he had previously given them but it was not to be—the missionary period in Texas was coming to a close. By the following July, Pacheco received orders to send his cavalry to San Antonio to fight the Apaches and by February 1771 only three soldiers remained to protect the two Franciscans. The priests stayed at the request of the Indians, who still hoped for gifts of food and clothing. The pair finally gave up and retreated west with their escort. By 1773, all of the missions in eastern Texas and even the capital at Los Adaes were abandoned and moved to San Antonio when budgetary efficiency within the Spanish Empire took precedence.²⁷

El Orcoquisac nevertheless remained a gathering place for Indian traders for a time, but it was abandoned before James Long occupied Bolivar Peninsula in 1820. A few years later, an Anglo-American named Miller occupied the shell mounds along the lakeshore, giving his name to the lake. Later residents planted the old mission fields in corn and cotton and grazed cattle in the area. Arrow points and artifacts surfaced from time to time and the old mission burial ground became known as “the Indian graveyard.” In the 1960s, the presidio site suffered severe damage when sand pits were dug for use in raising the road bed for Interstate Highway 10.

The site of El Orcoquisac lies on land now owned by private individuals and the U.S. Corps of Engineers' Wallisville Lake project; as of 1991, the flooding plan did not include the already explored archaeological sites of the mission and presidio complex. The general location of El Orcoquisac had been established by scholars Herbert Eugene Bolton and Harbert Davenport in 1915, but it was 1966 before a plat map of the mission and presidio surfaced. Local amateur historian John V. Clay was searching Spanish records and recognized the outline of Lake Miller on a map labeled “Plano del Presidio de S Luis de las Amarillas o del Orcoquizac...” made by one of the engineers

²⁶Bolton, 373-374.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 372, 374.

accompanying the Marqués de Rubí in 1767. The somewhat deceptive label apparently had confused previous researchers. The presidio San Luis de las Amarillas on the San Sabá River was created in 1757, one year after the one at El Orcoquisac; but in 1761, the San Sabá presidio changed its name to Real Presidio de San Sabá and its old name was attached to Presidio San Agustín de Ahumada though the “de las Amarillas” seemingly was not widely used at El Orcoquisac.²⁸

After Clay's discovery, State Archaeologist Curtis Tunnell and J. Richard Ambler, then director of the Texas Archaeological Salvage Project, visited the site. Prehistoric pottery was visible along the lake shore. Subsequent archaeological excavations between 1967 and 1970 found European artifacts, including two copper crucifixes and French and Spanish ceramics, which confirmed the location of the trading post, mission, and presidio.²⁹

In summary, El Orcoquisac, founded late in the mission period to prevent French traders from entering southeastern Texas, failed to convert many natives. The Indians had become accustomed to European trade goods, and the Spanish governor at Los Adaes became a participant in the trade himself to provide for their needs. The Indians in the area did not enter the missions or become productive agricultural peons and only a few seemed interested in becoming Christians. Thus, after 1763, when Spain no longer was threatened by the French presence in Louisiana, Spanish authorities abandoned the missions and presidios in eastern Texas. By the time the United States purchased Louisiana and the westward migration of Americans threatened Spanish Texas, the weakened empire could not fight both the foreigners and the republican revolutionaries struggling for independence for Mexico from 1810 to 1821.

However, some Spaniards have not forgotten the military exploits of the frontier soldiers. In honor of the quincentenary of Christopher Columbus's voyage, eight Spanish Army officers from the historic and still-active Regimiento de Cazadores de Montaña América 66 stationed at Pamplona in northern Spain decided to retrace the route taken by the Marqués de Rubí during his inspection tour of the frontier presidios and missions in 1766-67. Accompanying Rubí was Don José de Urrutia, then a lieutenant in the royal regiment, who rose to the rank of captain general in 1794 and is considered the founder of the much-decorated unit. The eight officers flew to El Paso in September 1990 and made a symbolic march on foot from Albuquerque to Santa Fe before proceeding more sensibly by automobile to the presidios and missions

²⁸Bolton, 346; Joseph W. McKnight, “Real Presidio de San Sabá,” *El Campanario* 12 (October 1981): 53.

²⁹Fullen.

at San Sabá, San Antonio, Goliad, and to Houston to visit El Orcoquisac. At each place, the colonel in command presented tinted copies of two 1760s maps of the Texas frontier from the regiment's archives and plaques bearing the regimental coat of arms. Like their regiment's founder, José de Urrutia, the modern Spanish soldiers encountered typical fall weather—hot and then cold with an unexpected norther—and the different climates from high, dry Santa Fe to subtropical Houston. And, like those members of Rubí's expedition, the eight were astonished at the great distances in Texas. In the case of these quincentenary pilgrims, the distances prevented a visit to Nacogdoches and Los Adaes, and they finished their journey at El Orcoquisac.³⁰

³⁰Colonel Mariano Alonso Baquer, "Expedicion General Urrutia" (Pamplona, Spain, 1990), souvenir pamphlet presented to Dr. Margaret S. Henson, who escorted the officers in Houston. The plaque and map were presented to the Wallisville Heritage Park.

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