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FRONTIER BUILDING AND FRANCISCAN MISSIONS: LA FLORIDA IN THE 17TH CENTURY

Steven Filoromo

Spain's attempts at colonizing the New World were quite variable. While the Spanish largely suppressed Indigenous coalescence for fear of resistance, their tribulations in the colony of La Florida illustrate that Spain's support for colonizing the New World was in trouble. Very early in the settlement of San Agustín (St Augustine) and Santa Elena, the Florida colony vouched for the *Situado*, or government subsidy program, to sustain the area as they provided a strategic defense to Spanish efforts in the New World. While the *Situado* is intended to provide the materials that the colony failed to produce, its effects were far-reaching as the frontiers of mission expanded further into the Florida panhandle and up the Atlantic coast of Georgia. Issues with the lack of consistency with the *Situado* helped create abject impoverishment during the First Spanish Period (1565-1704) in the administrative center and *Presidio* of St Augustine, thus forcing many of the missions to rely on other sources of subsistence since supplies trickled down from the port of St Augustine. Missions largely bore the brunt of the *Situado*'s instability despite the fact it was the main source of many materials required for Christianizing the natives. Several issues are clear through the documents of the colony of Florida, including friars abandoning their posts, and conflicts with other Indigenous communities. Governor Moore of South Carolina gave the final blows to the colony in 1704, but Spanish strength waned long before then as many of the aforementioned issues remained from the colony's earliest days. However, because of the *Situado*, it is clear that dissension amongst missions and increasing external pressures in the American colonies is the primary reason for the waning strength of Spanish frontier building in La Florida.

As the first waves of colonization reached the land of La Florida, they initially came as a response to the new French Huguenot fort on the St. Johns River (modern-day Duval County). Explorers that trekked through the reaches of northeast Florida never established a permanent settlement, but as Pedro Menendez de Aviles and his

entrada camped near the soon-to-be *Presidio* of San Agustín, they spent much of their time tearing down the French fort.¹ Following Spanish success in the region, Menendez established three *Presidios*, or fortified bases, along the coast following his founding of San Agustín in 1565. These *Presidios* included San Mateo, the former French fort, Santa Elena (Parris Island, which is abandoned in roughly two decades), and San Agustín. The decades following the founding of the colony proved to be trying, and as Spaniards in the land realized they were unable to exert their influence over Indigenous groups like they were in the Caribbean, they deemed the colony unproductive.

As administrative officials from the Council of the Indies determined that Florida offered little material value to their efforts, they sought to use the land as a strategic defensive colony, offering the colony a *Situado*. The *Situado* essentially acted as a government subsidy that ensures financial stability and material sustainability; however, it was not initially intended to be used for the wellbeing of the entire colony.² The *Situado* initially was received as this beneficial program that would mitigate the abject conditions of life in the land; however, it came with some issues. The *Situado* was designed to provide certain supplies based on the dotación, which essentially documents how many Spanish soldiers, military families, religious official, and other administrative positions are in the colony and need to be provided for.³ The one problem was, this does not account for population growth in the colony. Florida was a melting pot throughout the First Spanish Period, especially as mestizos and criollos join the population.⁴

As San Agustín prevailed as the primary *Presidio* for the colony of La Florida, it served as the base for all activities within what is now the southeastern United States. Royal orders often referred to as cédulas are essentially the laws to which the colonists are to abide by, assuming that they were enforced.⁵ Included within the Royal Orders are the approved amounts of supplies that are available

for the different people who benefit from the *Situado*. While the *Situado* is not a cedula, understanding how the cedula influenced the *Situado* becomes important. Father Leturiondo, a priest of the St Augustine parish in the late 1600s, issued complaints to royal officials because of the lacking supplies that he attempted to pick up in 1689. He was turned away as he attempted to retrieve the wine, flour, and wax allotted for the Parish, stating that the officials requested the cedula that outlined the number of materials he was to receive.⁶ While the Crown stated the cedula did not exist, Leturiondo insisted that the Governor or some other official stole it from him.⁷

Leturiondo's problem is part of a larger plague on Spanish colonial society in San Agustín. The *Situado* was terribly inconsistent and was threatened by shipwrecks and corruption.⁸ Because of this looming threat, it was in the interest of Spanish-Floridians to send an overseer, or *Situador*, to ensure accuracy in the acquisition of supplies.⁹ Because of early issues with the shortages of the *Situado*, the Viceroy of Mexico assumed full responsibility for the payment of the *Situado*.¹⁰ This is problematic because Mexico and Florida are far from each other with no overland route for Spanish use, and if issues happened that require the attention of the Viceroy, a month would go by before a response was given. Additionally, if there were issues within Mexico that required extra resources, those would be allocated to that situation rather than for the Florida *Situado*.¹¹ Because of these abject conditions, the inhabitants would have to turn to labor forces already available for them.

Indigenous communities within the territories of La Florida consists of the Timucua, Apalachee, Guale, Mayaca, and many others. Complex social systems were already in place by the time the Spanish and French arrived; however, due to the abrupt nature of the initial interactions, Menendez cautioned those who come to the land.¹² Menendez declared that because of the issues his colony faced in these early years, that the natives of these land are subjects of the colony, and slaves of the Spanish.¹³ This letter, written in 1574 and entitled *Indios de la Costa de Florida*, is the primary justification for the continued pursuit of Indigenous Christianization as the colony grew a decade old.

The primary reason that Spanish forces continued to colonize the New World is that the Catholic Church declared through the 1493 Papal Bull that they may colonize any nation they encounter that shows no signs of Christianity. Spain worked in tandem with the Catholic Church in order to secure support for continuing its mission. Pope Alexander VI declared that these expeditions may continue following the understanding that they shall not infringe upon of Christian nations.¹⁴ While Florida was not necessarily in a position to fully carry out these holy missions on the same scale that other parts of the New World were experiencing, around fifty missions are active within the first Spanish period (1565-1704). However, the mission model takes on its own form as the colony came into its own.

From the first mission of Nombre de Dios in St Augustine, it was clear that Indigenous communities were meant to live in these missions to keeps them out of the city. The 1576 map of San Agustín shows that Nombre de Dios was located outside of the town near several small streams that empty out into the main river. On the map, writing refers to the area as "pueblos de yndios, Nombre de Dios," or Village of Indians, Name of God (Nombre de Dios is the name of the settlement/mission).¹⁵ In this case of mission-building, there are several elements present. First, there were four structures with a cross situated towards the façade on the roof, showing that religious buildings are present. Second, there are two different types of non-religious buildings essentially being Indigenous and Colonial dwelling. Two of the nonreligious dwellings at Nombre de Dios indicate common Indigenous construction, and five of the other demonstrate cross-hatching on the roofs, something common to colonial structures built by both Indigenous and European peoples. For the case of Nombre de Dios, its establishment at the administrative center of the colony allowed for access to resources more than that of missions on the frontier.

Nombre de Dios presents additional population information valuable to the tribulations of mission life as well. Religious upheaval at mission sites further from the city, specifically in the Guale province to the north of San Agustín, required the depopulation and transportation of different mission inhabitants. One such case, where

fugitive slaves amongst the Ocone congregated away from the mission, gave many difficulties for the administration in San Agustín. By 1655, the colonial administrations' issues became resolved (on paper) which is marked by the appearance of a letter stating that the Ocone were to move to Nombre de Dios.¹⁶ Actions like these, where deteriorating missions are removed and natives sent to other missions, are common in many of the primary and secondary documents of the time. The main causes of these concerns either revolve around a lack of structure from the priest, or growing irritations from the Timucua, Guale, and Apalache communities that are affected.

For the settlers of San Agustín, their lifeline relied purely on Indigenous labor and missionization and without missionization, Indigenous labor was nonexistent. Despite the *New Laws* adoption in the 1540s, Indigenous labor, while looked down upon elsewhere in the Spanish Americas, found support through the Ordenanzas de Felipe II, or the Ordinances of Phillip II, which restrict town planning and allow land to be sold with natives on it, essentially selling the native(s) occupying the land to the new landowner.¹⁷ These occupants are forced to become burden bearers and day laborers, generally carrying goods from the Apalachee missions that fed the entire colony.¹⁸ Therefore, the missions, while carrying out the auspices of Christianization, acted as an expansion of sociopolitical control. Phillip II's ordinances are enacted prior to the establishment of San Agustín; therefore, from its inception, the colonial administration exerted its influence over the land it touched without the insight of the Indigenous communities they would alter. Additional attempts for sociopolitical advances (imposed by Pedro Menendez de Aviles, the first Governor) existed in the form of an (attempted) tribute system and collusion in chiefly elections.¹⁹ These merely act as social forms of mission building, whereas physical forms, while briefly mentioned in connection with the Mestas map (1576), demonstrating a lack of organization in contrast to Spanish enforcement.

No single mission was ever built from the same materials, laid out in the same way, or managed the same way. Friars are required by the *Presidio's* administration to make many concessions due to the instability of their work,

unlike their counterparts in more active colonial regions like Veracruz. It is implied that variability relies on whether or not there is a pre-existing town, negative interactions, or lack of managerial expertise and that these factors determine how similar or dissimilar the settlements are from an urban one.²⁰ Physically, these issues are preserved in the archaeological record—marked by the existence of different materials like alters, medallions, or the remains of different religious buildings. Permanent furnishings such as the altar stone exist in open chapels, which are presumably locked if there is a resident priest; however, missions such as visitas, or a converted village lacking a friar, lack permanent fixtures.²¹ However, there are no clear-cut methods determining the order of mission settlement, as archaeology shows, missions are "an evolving settlement" responding to varying socioenvironmental circumstances.²²

The systems of interaction in the colony created a stressful lifestyle for the Hispanic occupants of the region. Essentially, to be sent to Florida, one requires great self-sacrifice, as Spaniards saw life there as a "sentence to penal servitude."²³ Their reactions to the conditions as well as the common practices associated with colonization contributed to even worse conditions for the Apalachee, Timucua, and Guale that had direct contact with the settlements. Issues with the living conditions and the abuse of power revolved around missionization and the acquisition of goods and services from Indigenous labor.

Friars from Spain were widely dispersed anywhere colonial powers established a *Presidio*. From there, they would embark upon journeys to make contact with different communities to spread the word of God. Friars in Florida understood from their departure that to fulfill their duties, they will predominately spend their time travelling, sometimes entering the woods and going for months without relief.²⁴

In a dramatic response to this, Father Quiñones, who lived amongst the Mayaca and Jororo south of San Agustín, lied to the chief and disappeared from his post, which resulted in an investigation. Father Quiñones grew tired of living amongst the natives, spending his endless days following in the footsteps of the Yamasee

that have migrated into the Mayaca area. He fell ill due to his reliance on Indigenous subsistence practices while in pursuit of the Yamasee in the area, and in response, disappeared from his post after he told the chief that the mission was ordered to close (which is a lie) taking with him the bells and ornaments of his church.²⁵ Correspondence between Governor Cabrera and Leturiondo indicating that Quiñones behavior and actions contributed to low numbers of occupants at San Salvador de Mayaca, and that many Mayacans ran into the woods because of the lack of spiritual consolation.²⁶ Because of Quiñones's disappearance, the inquisition into the viability of the mission was further expanded upon when one of the chiefs stated that despite Mayacans disappearing into the woods, the "heathens" were still viable candidates for Christianization.²⁷ Governor Cabrera expressed concern that without a friar, the Christians of Mayaca might disappear into the woods too.²⁸

Quiñones's story is in several documents and illustrative of some of the more abnormal interactions of the time. He lied to close a mission and stole religious implements that were gifted to the settlement, thereby causing an uproar to the *Presidio's* administration in San Agustín.

In contrast to the dissension revolving around living conditions, power abuse became an issue that plagued the *Presidio* as well. It's suggested that many of these abuses came from the sentiments shared by whoever controlled the *Presidio* at that time; however, it was quite clear that the abuse of power towards Indigenous communities was justifiable through these ordinances passed in the earliest years of the colony. One case from San Luis de Talimali, the heart of the Apalachee territory, demonstrated this. A complaint filed on May 29, 1687, clarifies an additional form of negative interactions between natives (in this

case, the Apalachee) and the Spanish. The statement by Juan Ximénez in regard to the controversy surrounding lieutenant Antonio Matheos states that Matheos continued to abuse his position of power over natives by verbally and physically harming them.²⁹ A leading Apalachee Christian, do Mateo Chuba, had quite the contentious relationship with Antonio Matheos closer to this inquisition, for Matheos continuously pestered Chuba for maize and other goods.³⁰

The trials of mission building stemmed from the lack of sustainability of the colony. The settlers were keenly aware of this, and with the adoption of the *Situado*, Ordenanzas, and the Franciscan mission system, these attempts largely failed. The *Situado* attempted to bring subsidized materials to the land in order to supply the colony that ultimately provided a defensive barrier to the encroaching English in North America; however, its dependency on other New World cities like Havana and Veracruz contributed to the instability. Additionally, the efforts that enforced the Ordenanzas allowed for the legal enslavement of Indigenous peoples contributed deteriorating living conditions outside of the *Presidio*. Finally, the instability of missionization ultimately caused the greatest issues that plagued the land because of how 'terrible' the living conditions were and how power was overtly abused in the land. While San Agustín (St Augustine) went on to continue into the present, its early history demonstrates that the Spanish were not nearly as strong in building a colony as many have been led to believe.

ENDNOTES

1 This is merely a very simplified version of the history of the first camps. Menendez established his fort at what is now known as the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park, which is also the site of the Nombre de Dios mission/Le Leche shrine which is the first mission of the *Presidio*.

2 Verne Chatelain, *The Defenses of Spanish Florida: 1565-1763*, (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington Publication 511, 1941): 21

3 Verne Chatelain, 21.

4 The term mestizos refer to those of Spanish-Indian descent, whereas, criollos refers to people of full or partial Spanish descent born in the New World.

5 Ronald Childers, "The *Presidio* System in Spanish Florida 1565-1763," *Historical Archaeology*, 38, 3, (2004): 25.

6 Robert Kapitzke, *Religion, Power, and Politics*, in *Colonial St. Augustine*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida): 73.

7 Ibid.

8 Edward Chaney & Kathleen Deagan, "St Augustine and the La Florida Colony: New Life-Styles in a New Land," In *First Encounters: Spanish Explorations in the Caribbean and the United States, 1492-1570*," ed. Jerald Milanich, and Susan Milbrath, (Gainesville: Library Press @ UF, 2017): 177.

9 Ronald Childers, 27.

10 Verne Chatelain, 21.

11 Ibid.

12 Pedro Méndez de Avilés, "*Indios de la Costa de Florida*," 1574, Código de Referencia: ES.41091.AGI/29.6.38.4//Patronato 257,N.1,G.3,R.20, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain.

13 Ibid.

14 Bull of Pope Alexander VI, May 4, 1493, in *Documents of West Indian History: From the Spanish Discovery to the British Conquest of Jamaica* by Eric Williams, (Brooklyn: A & B Publishers Group, 1994): 201

15 Hernando de Mestas, "Plano del pueblo, fuerte y Caño de San Agustín de la Florida y del pueblo y Caño de San Sebastián," 1576, Código de Referencia:ES.41091/AGI/27.12//MP-FLORIDA_LUISIANA,3, Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Spain. Nombre de Dios translates to "in the name of God," which is a recurring thing for Spanish settlement during the initial phase of discovery. Since religion was a key aspect allowing for the continued exploration and exploitation of the New World, new settlements were established "in the name of God."

16 John Hann, *A History of the Timucua Indians and Missions*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996): 156.

17 Jerald Milanich, *The Timucua*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996): 94

18 Ibid, 112.

19 Edward Chaney & Kathleen Deagan, 173

20 Rebecca Saunders, "Mission-Period Settlement Structure: A Test of the Model at San Martín de Timucua," *Historical Archaeology*, 30, no. 4, (1996): 25

21 Saunders, 26

22 Saunders, 33

23 Verne Chatelain, 22-3.

24 Verne Chatelain, 26.

25 Martin Lasso, "proposal to the governor of St Augustine", 1682, In MS 086: Reemergence of Anacape and Mayaca Missions, 1679 on and Initiation of Jororo Missions, tr. by John Hann, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida.

26 Marquez Cabrera, "Auto," 1682, In MS 086: Reemergence of Anacape and Mayaca Missions, 1679 on and Initiation of Jororo Missions, tr. by John Hann, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida.

27 John Hann, "The Mayaca and Jororo and Missions to Them," In *The Spanish Missions of La Florida* edited by Bonnie McEwan, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1993): 123-4

28 Marquez Cabrera, "Auto."

29 Juan Ximénez, "Auto and statement of the ensign" May 29, 1687, In MS 001: Matheos: Part 1 (1687), tr. by John Hann, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida.

30 don Matteo Chuba, "Statement of, Leading Indian of These Provinces," May 29, 1687, In MS 001: Matheos: Part 1 (1687), tr. by John Hann, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida.