



Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga: A Frontier Mission in South Texas (Texas Archaeology & Ethnohistory)

Tamra Lynn Walter

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In the early part of the eighteenth century, the Spanish colonial mission Espíritu Santo de Zúñiga was relocated from far south Texas to a site along the Guadalupe River in Mission Valley, Victoria County. This mission, along with a handful of others in south Texas, was established by the Spaniards in an effort to Christianize and civilize the local Native American tribes in the hopes that they would become loyal Spanish citizens who would protect this new frontier from foreign incursions.

With written historical records scarce for Espíritu Santo, Tamra Walter relies heavily on material culture recovered at this site through a series of recent archaeological investigations to present a compelling portrait of the Franciscan mission system. By examining findings from the entire mission site, including the compound, irrigation system, quarry, and kiln, she focuses on questions that are rarely, if ever, answered through historical records alone: What was daily life at the mission like? What effect did the mission routine have on the traditional lifeways of the mission Indians? How were both the Indians and the colonizers changed by their frontier experiences, and what does this say about the missionization process?

Walter goes beyond simple descriptions of artifacts and mission architecture to address the role these elements played in the lives of the mission residents, demonstrating how archaeology is able to address issues that are not typically addressed by historians. In doing so, she presents an accurate portrait of life in South Texas at this time. This study of Mission Espíritu Santo will serve as a model for research at similar early colonial sites in Texas and elsewhere.

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