

San Juan Bautista: Jesuit Mission to the Guarani

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In 1680, the Portuguese established Colonia de Sacramento across the La Plata estuary from Buenos Aires in modern Uruguay. This Portuguese expansion threatened Spain's position in the region, and challenged Spain's claim to the *Banda Oriente*.

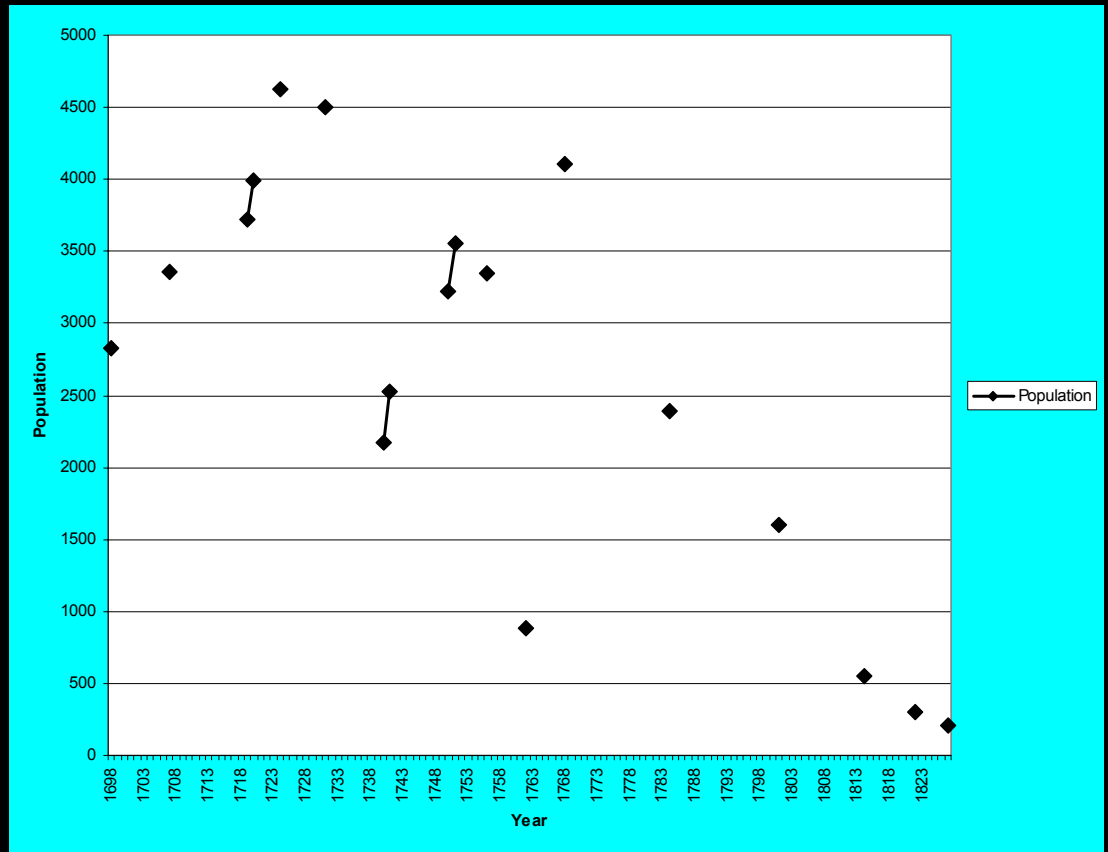
The Jesuits expanded their mission frontier in the Rio de la Plata region by moving existing missions to sites east of the Uruguay River, and by establishing new missions. In order to facilitate the rapid development of the new missions, the Jesuits relocated thousands of Guarani neophytes from existing missions. In 1697, the Jesuits established San Juan Bautista with neophytes transferred from San Miguel. And in 1690, the Jesuits established San Lorenzo Martir with neophytes from Santa Maria la Mayor. By 1710, there were seven missions located east of the Uruguay River, establishing Spain's claim to the disputed borderlands.

Map showing disputed borderlands.

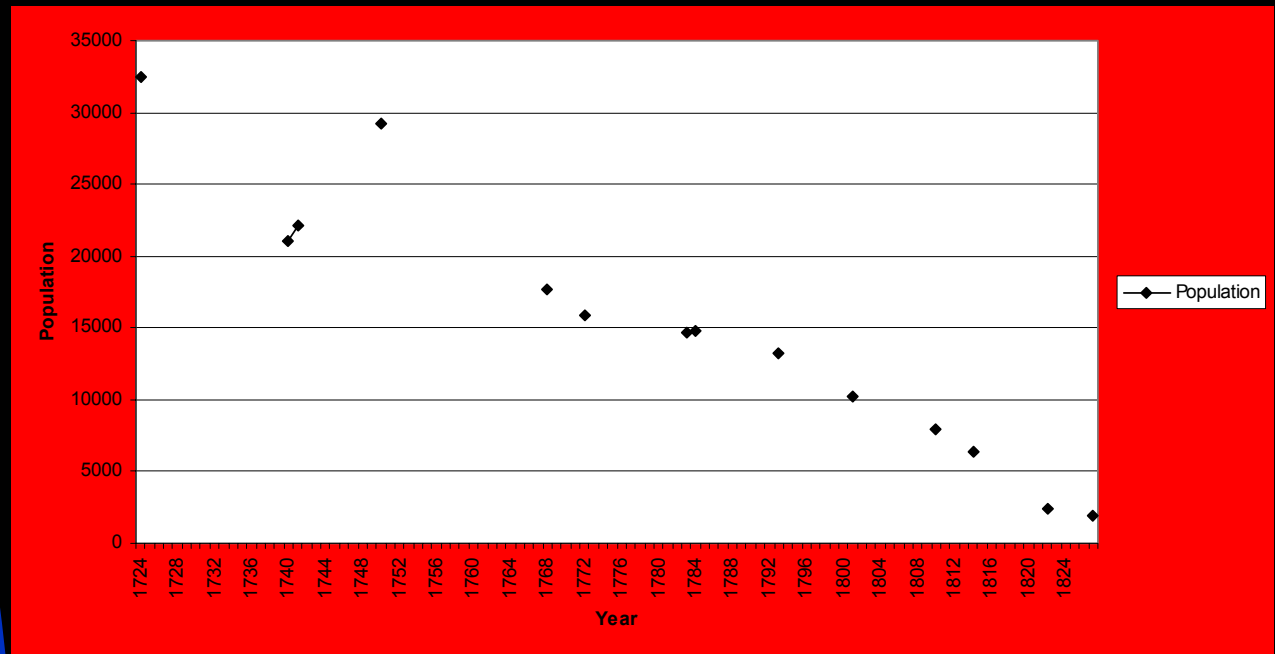


The population of San Juan Bautista grew until the 1730s, declined as the result of several epidemics, and then recovered. In 1750 Spain and Portugal signed the Treaty of Madrid, and transferred the seven trans-Uruguay missions to Portugal. The Guarani residents of the seven missions revolted, but a joint Spanish-Portuguese expedition suppressed the uprising in 1756. Spain and Portugal agreed to abandon the Treaty of Madrid, and Portugal returned the seven missions to Spain. However, the missions were already declining as a result of the war and the flight of Guarani. In 1767, the Spanish government ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits, which further contributed to the decline of San Juan Bautista and the other Guarani missions.

Population of San Juan Bautista, 1698-1827.



Decline of population of seven trans-Uruguay missions, 1750-1827.

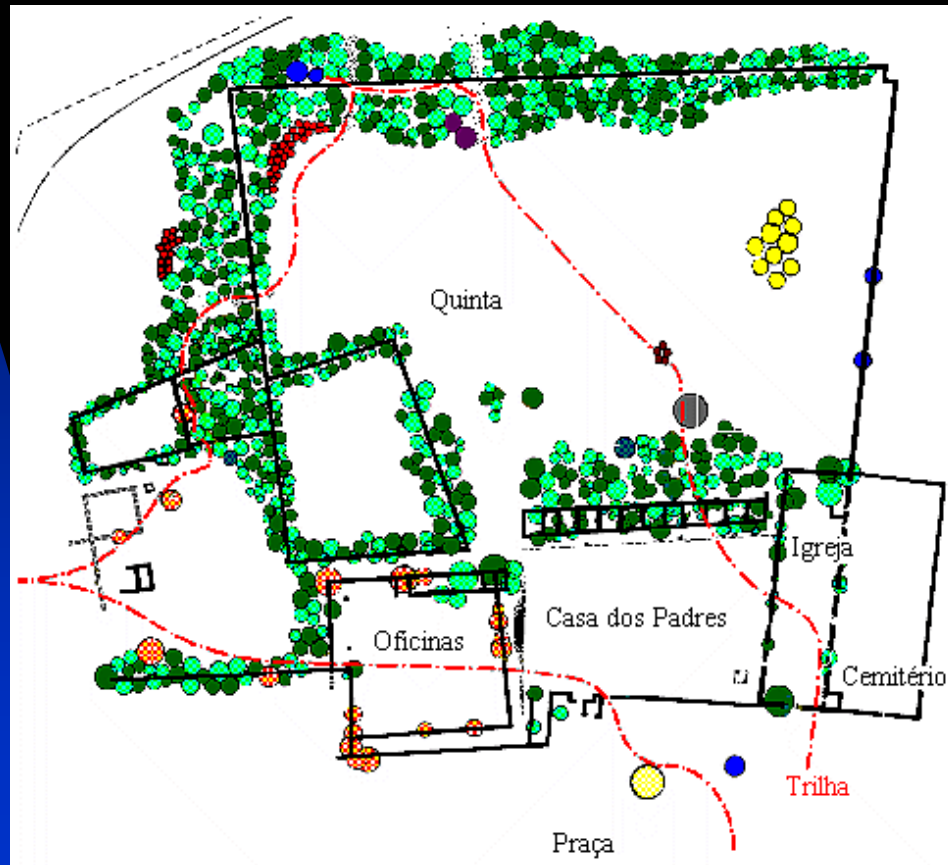


The Jesuits directed the construction of an extensive building complex dominated by a large stone church. A c. 1756 diagram shows the fully developed building complex.

Contemporary diagram of San Juan Bautista.



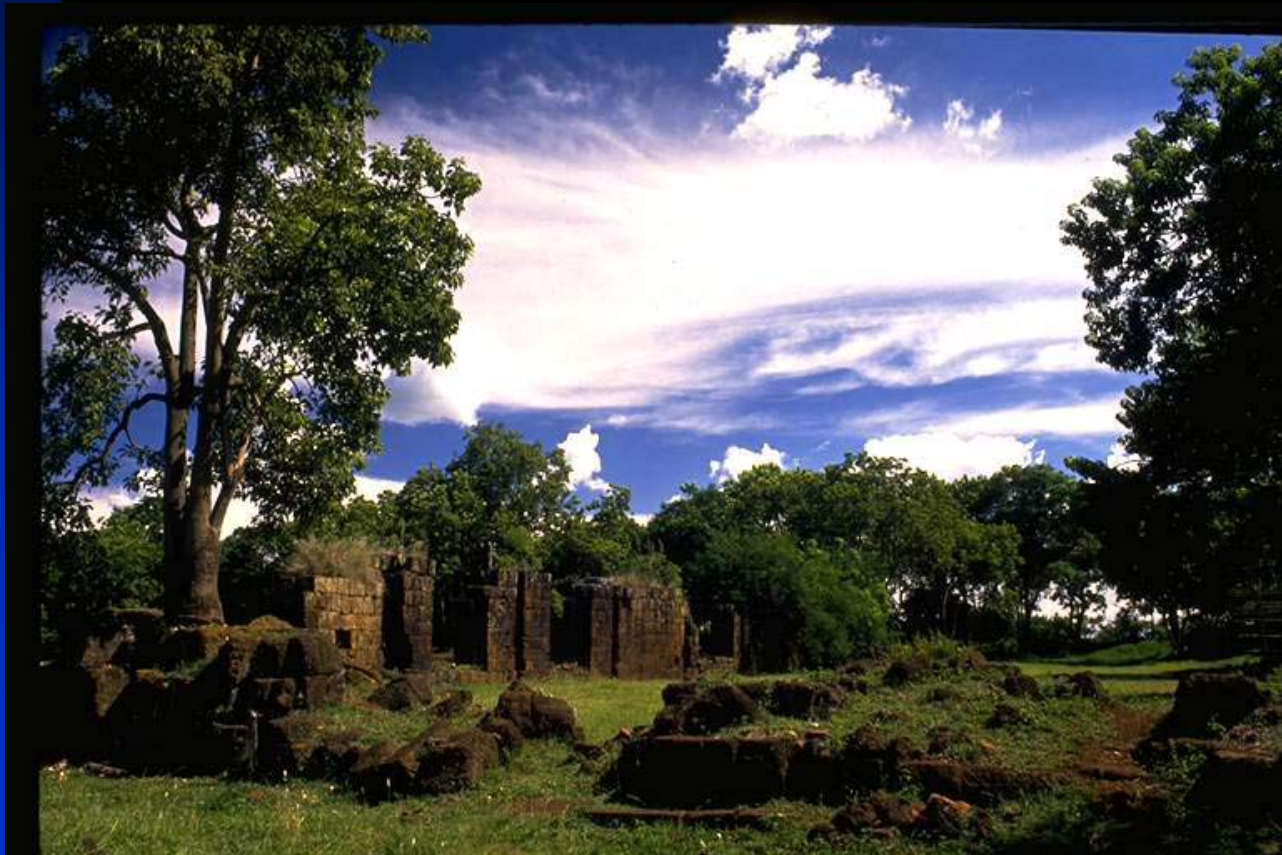
Diagram of ruins of San Juan Bautista.



Ruins of San Juan Bautista, built of basalt.



Ruins of the Church.



Ruins of the church.



Mission ruins.







Ruins of the church.



Ruins of church.



Ruins of cloister.



Cemetery wall.



Cemetery wall.



Cemetery wall.



Archaeologists have conducted excavations at the San Juan Bautista mission site, revealing much about the texture of day to day life in the mission.



I would like to thank Henrique Chagas for allowing the use of photographs in this PowerPoint from his website: www.Verdestrigos.Com.br, under the title “Republica dos Guaranis.”