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Location of Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas based on the map produced by Nicolas de Laffora, August 12, 1767. Courtesy of the Archivo General de Indias [Mapas y Planos, Mexico 05]

New Light on Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas [San Sabá]

BY ALLAN J. KUETHE AND JOSÉ MANUEL SERRANO ÁLVAREZ*

WITH THE COLLAPSE OF THE SECOND FAMILY COMPACT DURING the reign of Ferdinand VI (1746–1759), Spain’s frontier policy in its North American empire acquired an aggressive, militarized character, especially where French interests were involved. An important manifestation of this new orientation appeared in the Governorship of Texas with the establishment of Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas on the remote San Saba River in 1757. Designed to counter supposed French adventurism, this post represented an ambitious, perhaps misguided, thrust into the far northwest, which would continue into the early years of Charles III (1759–1788). Taking a view with a broader strategic perspective, the present authors believe that Presidio San Luis, often popularly referred to as Presidio San Sabá, was far more significant than many historians have generally supposed. Indeed, during its apogee from 1758–1763, San Luis ranked as the most important presidio in Texas in terms of size, garrison, and costs, all of which far exceeded those of other strongpoints.¹ Although abandoned during the far-reaching reorganization

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¹José Manuel Serrano Álvarez and Allan J. Kuethe, “La Texas colonial entre Pedro de Rivera y el marqués de Rubí, 1729–1772: aportaciones económicas al sistema presidial,” *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 14 (Summer 2005), 301. A plate of the presidio can be found in Max L. Moorhead, *The Presidio: Bastion of the Spanish Borderlands* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 138–139.

of the northern frontier that the Marqués de Rubí initiated in 1766, and then largely forgotten, the origins of Presidio San Luis, its purpose, and its fate reveal much about royal priorities in Texas during the years before, during, and immediately after Spain's entry into the Seven Years' War.

The story of Captain Felipe de Rábago y Terán, who commanded Presidio San Luis, is inseparable from its history. Events that occurred during his early years, particularly when he commanded San Luis's predecessor at San Xavier, have earned Rábago the universal disdain of historians ranging from Fray Juan Agustín Morfi in the eighteenth century to Robert S. Weddle, Donald E. Chipman, and Luis López Elizondo in recent times.² Rábago certainly ranks as one of the most puzzling officials who served in Bourbon Texas. Yet, new information and a fresh assessment of the evidence against him raise questions that place Rábago in a new light. An uncommonly prominent appointee for remote Texas, the captain enjoyed powerful connections in both Spain and Mexico, but his destiny closely reflected the ups and downs of that influence in the torturous politics that pervaded Madrid and Mexico City. There was far more to this man than historians have heretofore appreciated.

When seen from a broader perspective, both the character of the San Sabá advance and the Rábago controversy reflected the changing relationship between church and state as the growing influence of the Enlightenment imposed a secular, regalist agenda on colonial policy. This process reached a definitive moment diplomatically when, in 1753, Spain negotiated "a totally regalist concordat" with the Papacy, which in effect increased dramatically the crown's administrative power over the Spanish church. Significantly, the king's Jesuit confessor and a relative of Captain Rábago, Francisco de Rábago, managed most of the negotiations for that treaty.³ Although Texas was a remote frontier colony, the regalist transformation in Spanish administration had a significant influence on its political culture. As the co-equal status of the Catholic Church eroded, Captain Rábago and several colonial governors not surprisingly refused to accept missionaries as equal partners, regarding them instead as subordinates and treating them accordingly. And the San Sabá undertaking itself, although far from entirely neglecting missionary concerns, would assume a decidedly secular personality. In effect, it and Rábago's actions were different sides of the same coin.

It should be remembered that David J. Weber, in his highly influential *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages during the Age of Enlightenment*, documented the widespread transformation of frontier policy under Charles III toward a decidedly secular, militarized approach. Weber wrote, "In contrast to the Habsburgs, who gave missionaries a privileged position on the frontier of the

² Fray Juan Agustín Morfi, *History of Texas, 1673-1779*, trans. by Carlos E. Castañeda (Albuquerque: University New Mexico Press, 1935), part 2, 330; Donald E. Chipman and Luis López Elizondo, "New Light on Felipe Rábago y Terán," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 111 (Oct. 2007), 161, 174.

³ José Luis Gómez Urdáñez, *El marqués de la Ensenada: el secretario de todo* (Madrid: Punta de Vista Editores, 2017), 169; John Lynch, *Bourbon Spain, 1700-1808* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 160-195.

empire, the Bourbons relied on professional officers ... to promote frontier development and gave them authority over the missionaries.⁴ The present authors believe that the frontier practices of Charles III, like so much of his reformist agenda, had their roots firmly planted in the innovations championed by the powerful Marqués de la Ensenada (1743–1754) during the 1740s and 1750s.⁵ The evolution of frontier policy in Texas during the reign of Ferdinand VI and its culmination on the San Sabá provide an illuminating example.

Major diplomatic developments and a profound reorientation at court preceded Madrid's turn toward an aggressive frontier policy under Ferdinand VI and the coming of Presidio San Luis. At the time that the crown established a strongpoint on the San Sabá, Spanish and French relations languished in the aftermath of the rupture that had occurred during the final years of the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748). As Ensenada perceptively advised King Ferdinand at the start of his reign, "France will feign desires for union and even war with the enthusiasm of the moment, but it will be to advance the success of its objectives at our expense."⁶ Ensenada, who dominated the royal cabinet by holding the portfolios for War, Treasury, and Marine and the Indies, had traditionally harbored pro-French sentiments, but recent events had shattered his faith in Spain's Bourbon ally.

Madrid had joined Versailles in the Second Family Compact in 1743, aiming to secure a throne in Italy for the *infante* Philip, son of King Philip V (1700–1746) and Queen Elizabeth Farnese. After initial difficulties, the French and Spanish had won major successes against the Austrian army in 1745, securing the Duchy of Parma, where Philip enjoyed a dynastic claim through his mother. Soon afterward, a victory at Bassignana had opened the door to Lombardy, and on December 19, the *infante* entered Milan. King Philip harbored high hopes. As Ensenada instructed the Spanish ambassador to Versailles, the Prince of Campoflorido, His Majesty hoped to proclaim Philip as the Duke of Milan, but he did not wish to do so without the "express or tacit consent or approval of the King of France." Thus, Ensenada wrote, "he has resolved that I, entrusted with the most utmost secrecy, write you this letter to caution you by his Royal Order that, concealing [your motive] in your discussion with His Most Christian Majesty, only suggest—as your idea—how suitable seizing the moment would

⁴ David J. Weber, *Bárbaros: Spaniards and Their Savages in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 102. Some years earlier, albeit in a narrower context, Allan J. Kuethe reached substantially the same conclusion for the Viceroyalty of New Granada, where militarized pacification campaigns challenged the Guajiro Indians west of the Gulf of Venezuela in the 1770s and the Cunas of Darién in the 1780s. In both instances, the missionary found himself relegated to second place relative to the soldier. See Allan J. Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society in New Granada, 1773–1808* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978), 130–144, and Allan J. Kuethe, "The Pacification Campaign on the Riohacha Frontier, 1772–1779," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 50 (Aug. 1970), 467–481.

⁵ For the Marqués de Ensenada reforms, see Kuethe and Kenneth J. Andrien, *The Spanish Atlantic World in the Eighteenth Century: War and the Bourbon Reforms, 1713–1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 143–210.

⁶ Quoted in José Antonio Escudero, *Los orígenes del Consejo de Ministros en España, Volume I* (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979), 175.

be for both monarchies to declare the *infante* the Duke of Milan, as well as the fear or respect that this would cause his enemies.”⁷ As developments would soon show, King Philip wanted too much.

Both parties promised not to enter negotiations separately, but French Minister of State Renato D’Argenson, fearing excessive Spanish influence in Italy, jilted Madrid by entering into secret, but poorly concealed, talks with Spain’s rival, Piedmont-Sardinia. The monarchs were stunned, as was Ensenada. When Philip died unexpectedly months later, his son and successor, Ferdinand VI, named as his secretary of State José de Carvajal y Lancaster, a magistrate deeply suspicious of the French and inclined toward a rapprochement with the English. The Family Compact disintegrated further when Versailles assumed a patronizing posture toward Madrid during the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle. The war had not gone well after the rupture between the Bourbon powers; in the end, young Philip received only Parma and Plasencia and a minor duchy, but not Lombardy as his father hoped. In 1750, not surprisingly, the Spanish buried the hatchet with London through the Treaty of Madrid.⁸ The *neutralidad fernandista* that followed saw the Spanish at times seem closer to London than Versailles. That reorientation soon showed in colonial policy.

Although Ensenada realistically viewed the British as Spain’s greatest threat in America, skepticism dominated his opinions concerning the French. His advice to King Ferdinand in 1747 explains much about his policy for the Texas frontier: “Although it might be advantageous to enter into some sort of treaty with her (France) ... prudence dictates that one remain alert and cautious, having the preparations ready for whatever might come up ... [while] placing the frontier strongpoints (*plazas*) on the highest level of readiness.”⁹ Ensenada put his convictions into practice the following year when he launched a massive colonization project in northeastern Mexico, mainly but not entirely below the Río Grande, in a jurisdiction called New Santander, thus securing the coastal area north of New Spain’s lucrative silver mines while protecting the southern flank of Texas. Elsewhere, when Ensenada dispatched Jacinto de Barrios y Jáuregui to Texas as governor, he specifically told him to shore up the eastern border with Louisiana at Los Adaes. By this time, regalism had become increasingly evident

⁷ Ensenada to Campoflorido, El Pardo, Jan. 3, 1746, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Estado, leg. 4080. The *infante* Philip’s half-brother, Ferdinand, was prince of Asturias, while his older brother, Charles, had become the ruler of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. A useful account of the campaign against Austria can be found in Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 231–240.

⁸ Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 58–62, 195–196. D’Argenson’s single-minded contempt for the Spanish factored strongly into his blunders. See Browning, *Austrian Succession*, 294–295.

⁹ Ensenada, “Representación dirigida a Fernando VI sobre el estado del Real Erario y sistema y método para el futuro,” June 18, 1747, in Antonio Rodríguez Vila, *Don Cenón de Somodevilla, Marqués de la Ensenada...* (Madrid: Librería de M. Murillo, 1878), 61.

¹⁰ Patricia Osante, “Colonization and Control: The Case of Nuevo Santander,” in Jesús F. de la Teja and Ross Frank, eds., *Choice, Persuasion, and Coercion: Social Control on Spain’s North American Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 227–251; Herbert E. Bolton, *Texas in the Middle of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1915), 242; Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 167–193.

in the royal administration, where it had a strong proponent in Ensenada. His priorities for Spain's frontiers were diplomatic and military, and this appeared clearly in New Santander, where missionaries found themselves relegated to a secondary role. Strategic concerns took priority.¹⁰

While Madrid consolidated its position in New Santander, the predecessor to the San Sabá venture took shape well to the north and somewhat east of San Antonio, on the San Xavier (San Gabriel) River. The Franciscan friars, who evangelized in Texas, viewed their work as the cutting edge of frontier expansion, and that proved true at San Xavier, where they established three missions from 1747 to 1751. That undertaking, complete with a *presidio*, arose from the friars' petitions to Viceroy Conde de Revillagigedo to evangelize among the northern tribes. Their missionaries clearly stood in the vanguard. But concerns in Mexico City about French merchants crossing the north to trade in Santa Fe led to viceregal support for the undertaking and justified a fifty-man garrison. Strategically, a successful settlement helped bridge the vast gap between San Antonio and Los Adaes. As the Council of the Indies explained, the *presidio* was provided at the "request of the College of Apostolic Missionaries of Santa Cruz de Querétaro in order to safeguard from savage and heathen Indians the several missions being established in the Province of Texas . . . between the Presidios of San Antonio de Béjar and los Adaes."¹¹ As seen below, however, the missions and *presidio* on the San Xavier would find themselves transformed into a far different undertaking on the San Sabá.

As the San Xavier undertaking advanced, more strategic concerns arose in Mexico City and Madrid that directly involved Texas. In communications of February 16 and July 25, 1751, Viceroy Revillagigedo, whom Ensenada had elevated from governor of Havana to viceroy in 1746, warned him about the arrival of 1,600 French troops at Guarico in the French West Indies. The viceroy identified several points in North America where he feared potential French expansion, including New Spain's frontier with Louisiana, where they "aimed to expand that colony to the west." He requested 6,000 to 8,000 muskets. Revillagigedo's concern for Texas echoed the alarm raised by former governor Carlos Franquis Benítez de Lugo in a report to Ensenada five years earlier concerning the French extension of their holding on the Red River at Natchitoches, which had occurred during the time of his predecessor.¹² Now, in view of the cooling relations between Versailles and Madrid, these concerns assumed additional gravity.

Closely connected to Ensenada, Revillagigedo enjoyed a high degree of

¹⁰ Findings, Auditor de Guerra, Northern Frontier, Marqués de Altamira, Mexico City, Feb. 14, 1752, Archivo General de Indias (hereinafter AGI), Mexico, leg. 1933^a; Proceedings, Council of the Indies, Madrid, July 8, 1758, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 83.

¹² Ensenada to Sebastián de Eslava, Aranjuez, May 14, 1752, Archivo General de Simancas, Guerra Moderna, (hereinafter AGS, GM), leg. 6799; "Carlos Franquis Benítez de Lugo informa el miserable estado de la Provincia de Texas," May 21, 1746, AGI, Mexico, leg. 2446.

credibility at court.¹³ On May 14, 1752, Ensenada referred his reports to an elite, three-man *junta* headed by Sebastián de Eslava, the 1741 victor at Cartagena, whom he had recalled to Spain as captain general of Andalusia. The *junta* also included the Bailío Julián de Arriaga, who had suppressed the 1749 León revolt against the Caracas Company and presently served as president of the *Casa de la Contratación* (Board of Trade). Francisco Fernández Molinillo, a court insider who had extensive experience in Mexico and now served as a councilor of the Indies, completed the membership.¹⁴

Responding promptly to Ensenada, the *junta* saw little cause for widespread alarm given the extensive troop commitments that Versailles required to defend its vast, sprawling colonies. Nevertheless, the Texas-New Mexican frontier with Louisiana was another matter:

It is quite possible that the French, by their number (*muchedumbre*) and temperament—which boil over everywhere – might harbor designs to expand We believe that that the six thousand muskets that the viceroy of New Spain requests should be sent to him as quickly as possible, and that he be ordered to be on guard, with the greatest vigilance, concerning the operations of that nation, should it intend to expand or advance into parts of Texas, New Mexico, or elsewhere, in order to require them to withdraw at once.

Moreover, the viceroy should “expeditiously pursue the Commandant of Louisiana’s withdraw from the second presidio of Nachitoos (sic) ... [but] without using arms for now, in order to avert sudden confrontations should he resist.”¹⁵ This carefully reasoned advice reinforced Ensenada’s orientation toward armed vigilance. Accordingly, on July 26, 1752, he instructed Revillagigedo to be “constantly on the lookout and to exercise the most vigilant care ... lest the French should attempt to expand into ... Texas, New Mexico, or other provinces in order to warn them to desist immediately.”¹⁶

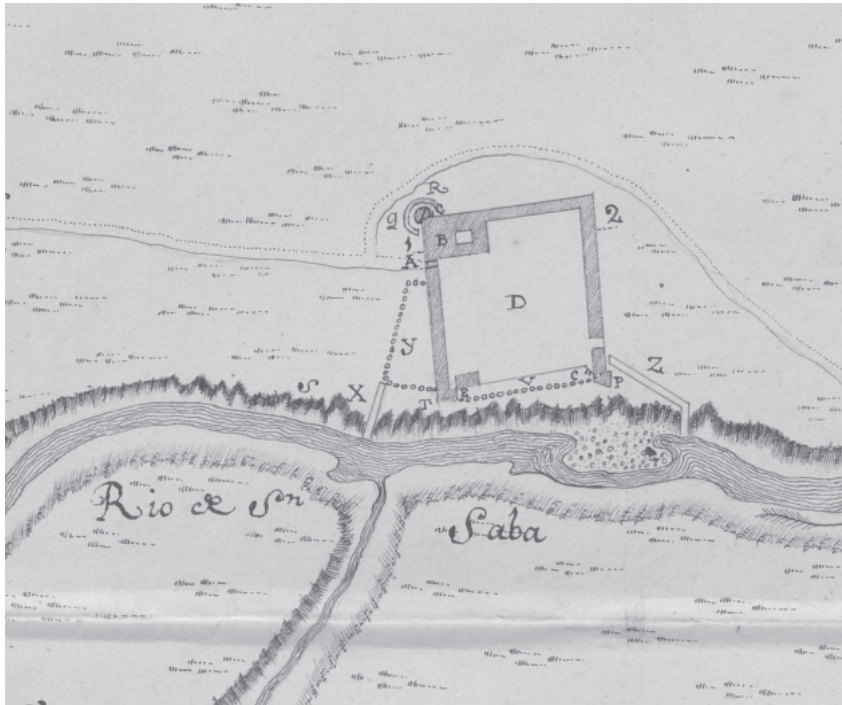
Upon the arrival of Ensenada’s instructions, Revillagigedo dispatched a small expedition under Lieutenant Juan Galván from San Antonio to explore to the northwest and find a strategic location appropriate for a Spanish outpost. During the summer of 1753, Galván moved beyond the source of the Pedernales River, crossed the Llano River, and eventually reached the San Sabá at a point about 145 miles from San Antonio. There, he found what seemed an ideal location near present-day Menard, with abundant water and land appropriate for irrigation.

¹³ Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 151–52; Christoph Rosenmüller, “Del ‘querido amigo’ al ‘partido antigubernativo’: la política imperial y la detención de clientes virreinales en la Nueva España, 1747–1768,” *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 57 (2020), 8.

¹⁴ Ensenada to Eslava, Aranjuez, May 14, 1752, AGS, GM, leg. 6799; Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 149–152, 163–164, 212; Mark A. Burkholder, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Councilors of the Indies, 1717–1808* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 41–42.

¹⁵ Select Committee report to Ensenada, Madrid, May 25, 1752, AGS, GM, leg. 6799.

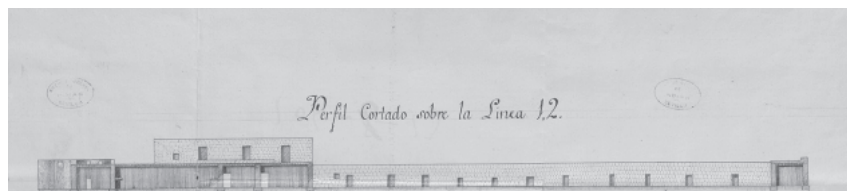
¹⁶ Quoted in Charles W. Hackett, “Policy of the French Crown Regarding French Encroachments from Louisiana, 1721–1762,” in George P. Hammond et al., eds., *New Spain and the Anglo-American West*, (Lancaster, PA: Lancaster Press, 1932), 123.



Plan of the Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas based on the map produced by Nicolas de Laffora, August 12, 1767. *Courtesy of the Archivo General de Indias [Mapas y Planos, Mexico 05]*

LEGEND

- | | |
|---|---|
| A. Main entrance | which covers blind spots on the flanks |
| B. Governor's quarters, also housing the chapel and the guard | S. Meanderings in the side of the ravine, each capable of concealing four to six men not visible from anywhere within the presidio. |
| C.C. Other entrances | V. Corral for horses, built with thick posts |
| D. Square, where the troops lodged | X.Z. Two trenches positioned to impede the enemy from advancing along riverbank |
| E. Short flank without breastworks | Y. Corral for cattle, built like that for horses |
| P. Tower containing a battery fitted for three small cannons on the lower floor (having just two) and three more cannons on the upper level | The dotted line shows the space cleared outside the presidio that should be cleared again owing to the regrowth of the mesquite. |
| Q. Ditch about six feet wide and six feet deep | |
| R. Tower with rampart and three mounted cannons, | |



North Wall of the Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas based on the map produced by Nicolas de Laffora, August 12, 1767. *Courtesy of the Archivo General de Indias [Mapas y Planos, Mexico 05]*

For good measure, he added in his report that the nearby hills promised rich mineral deposits. Moreover, the local Apaches, who seemed friendly, assured him that Santa Fe was not far to the west. Given the multiple challenges that the post would face, Galván recommended a 100-man garrison, which would be by far the largest in Texas. Revillagigedo, who received the report in October 1753, obviously saw enough merit in it to justify a second opinion.¹⁷

Meanwhile, in a closely related development that helped set the stage for the San Sabá undertaking, conditions at the San Xavier complex deteriorated rapidly. Although the venture had enjoyed a promising start, it soon confronted a series of withering misfortunes. A crippling draught accompanied by a smallpox epidemic ravaged the missions, and debilitating conflicts flared between the friars and the controversial *presidio* commander, Captain Felipe de Rábago y Terán, and the governor, Pedro de Barrio Junco de Espriella. The latter had never approved of the venture. Rábago's appointment as captain, likely by purchase, came directly from Madrid, a rare distinction for an office of minor importance, and it made him an outsider from the start.¹⁸ Also, Rábago's ties to the Jesuits, whose exalted status clearly irritated the Franciscans, surely added salt to the friars' wounds. In the rough and tumble of regalist politics, rivalries among the several regular orders remained. At that moment, the Jesuits held the upper hand.

Rábago's independence, regalism, and refusal to treat the missionaries as equals, and his alleged sexual indiscretions had quickly aroused severe clerical animosity. When the captain seemed implicated in a double murder in May 1752, with a friar among the victims, his standing as *presidio* commander became precarious. Moreover, the San Xavier undertaking was visibly failing by that time, with most of the neophytes having fled, perhaps owing in part to the clash among the feuding authorities set.¹⁹ Viceregal support for the venture faded accordingly, most especially when interest arose both in extending the Spanish position against the French farther west and in proselytizing among the Lipan Apaches.

Acting on November 13, 1753, Revillagigedo skillfully addressed these challenges simultaneously. First, he ordered Captain Pedro de Rábago y Terán, Felipe's uncle and the governor of Coahuila, to take interim command of the Santa Rosa del Sacramento *presidio* in north central Coahuila, where Captain

¹⁷ Carlos E. Castañeda, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, 1519-1936*, 7 vols. (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1936-1958), 3: 360-363.

¹⁸ Robert S. Weddle, *The San Sabá Mission: Spanish Pivot in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 32-33; Viceregal junta, Mexico, 1754, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 329; Bolton, *Texas*, 244. The appointment of Captain Felipe de Rábago y Terán was dated March 2, 1750. He acquired this office without prior experience. Constraints on the purchasing of offices had appeared under Philip V, but Rábago received his during wartime, when financial exigencies permitted looser standards. Moreover, *presidio* offices were a kind of hybrid between the regular army and the militia, a separate institutional reality. See Moorhead, *Presidio, 178-180*, and Kuethe, *Cuba, 1753-1815: Crown, Military, and Society* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 149-151.

¹⁹ Weddle, *San Sabá*, 33-34; Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 318-319. Gary B. Starnes, *The San Gabriel Missions, 1746-1756* (Madrid: Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1969), n.p.. A thorough account of Rábago's crime can be found in Chipman and López Elizondo, "New Light," 165-69.

Miguel de Garza Falcón had recently died. Next, he ordered the two Rábagos to swap positions. By detaching Felipe to Santa Rosa, he removed the cause of at least some of the turmoil at San Xavier, while Pedro provided the means to get an informed opinion about the problems there and, more important, to follow up on Gálvan's findings. Felipe, who remained the captain *propietario* (in possession) of the garrison at San Xavier, would stay at Santa Rosa "until the reasons that led to his removal desist or a satisfactory decision is made."²⁰ Pedro, who had served five years as Coahuila's deputy and five more as its governor, was, unlike his impetuous nephew, a veteran of the frontier and experienced Indian fighter. Moreover, he had twice led expeditions far into the north where "Spaniards had never set foot," and he had even reached the San Sabá. Obviously, Revillagigedo found in Pedro an ideal officer to inform him whether the San Xavier complex ought to be preserved at its present site, or if a move to the San Sabá River would better serve the desired ends. Further, it might be inferred that by replacing Felipe with Pedro, Revillagigedo thus avoided insulting the powerful Rábago family, which was no small consideration.²¹

On August 11, 1754, Pedro Rábago assumed command at San Xavier. After reviewing the presidial garrison and surveying the condition of the missions, he concurred with the general consensus that the outpost ought to be transferred to a better location. Recalling his expedition into Apache territory, he advocated a move to the San Sabá. From Santa Fe, he projected, "a direct road could easily be opened" to the San Sabá site "to establish direct commerce with this province of Texas, Coahuila, and the New Kingdom of León to head off the danger that threatens because of the absence of inhabitants between Texas and New Mexico, to keep the greedy French nation from establishing itself, as has happened in the past and is presently feared, as confirmed by various Apache Indians, and others, their confederates, with whom [the French] traffic in muskets, powder, bullets, and clothing, lending credibility to the apparent threats."²² To Rábago, a position on the San Sabá would anchor a security line extending to Santa Fe, thus blocking a French incursion into that exposed region. This viewpoint, of course, harmonized with the thinking in the royal administration. In December, Rábago set out from San Antonio to journey again to the San Sabá, where he confirmed his earlier opinion. Revillagigedo had been waiting to hear this, but

²⁰ "Hasta que cesen las causas que precisaron su remoción, o se tome la resolución que convenga." Revillagigedo, cédula, Nov. 13, 1753, in the *auto* of Don Pedro de Rábago y Terán concerning his appointment, 1748–1763, AGI, Mexico [transcription in Dunn Transcripts, Box 2Q148, Vol. 91 (1748–1763), Part 1, 184–209, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (hereinafter DT, DBCAH)]. Information about the location of Santa Rosa can be found in Moorhead, *Presidio*, 54, 62–63.

²¹ Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 336–337, 366–369. It should be noted that Captain Garza Falcón had been the viceroy's first choice to swap positions with Felipe Rábago, but his death intervened.

²² Pedro Rábago to Revillagigedo, San Francisco Xavier de Ggedo, Sept. 12, 1754, in the *auto* of Pedro de Rábago y Terán concerning his appointment, 1748–1763, AGI, Mexico [transcription in Box 2Q148, Vol. 91 (1748–1763), Part 1, 184–209, DT, DBCAH].

by this time his term as viceroy was nearing its end, while his benefactor in Madrid, Ensenada, was gone.²³

A palace coup ousted Ensenada in July 1754, but the new administration led by Ricardo Wall at State and Julián de Arriaga at Indies had even less sympathy for Versailles than he, and continuity prevailed in Spanish frontier policy. Arriaga's 1755 instruction to the Marqués de las Amarillas, who succeeded Revillagigedo as viceroy, reiterated the findings of the 1752 *junta*, emphasizing the viceroy's duty to proceed "with vigilance concerning the operations of [France], and should it attempt to expand into Texas, New Mexico, or some other part of [our] dominions, force it to desist, and seek this objective in your dealings with the commandant of Louisiana so that he abandons the Presidio of Nachitooos (sic) ... [but] without employing arms." Although by itself Texas had little value to Spain, Arriaga worried about "the distance of the French from the Royal Mines and the opportunities that might arise for them by land and water to approach our commerce, keeping in mind that this was the principal reason to expand into that vast Province of Louisiana."²⁴

At this point, events unfolding on the Gulf Coast of New Spain seemed to confirm the Spanish crown's worst fears. When Amarillas arrived in Mexico City in November 1755 to replace Revillagigedo, he found three Frenchmen imprisoned there along with two slaves. In October of the previous year, men dispatched by Governor Jacinto de Barrios y Jáuregui had apprehended these intruders on the lower Trinity River, which lay not far west of Louisiana. Believing them to be the vanguard for the settlement of some fifty families out of New Orleans, the governor assigned a detachment of troops to guard the site and sent the captives to Mexico City.²⁵ In mid-February, after consulting with the appropriate authorities, Amarillas ordered Governor Barrios to deploy thirty soldiers and an officer to establish a *presidio* near the river's mouth. This outpost would eventually be accompanied by a mission, with two friars to convert the local Indians. A civilian settlement projected to number some fifty families would follow eventually. Meanwhile, one of the French captives had died, but Amarillas dispatched the two survivors to Spain.²⁶

Owing to the strategic concerns involved, the military exercised the primary

²³ A useful summary of these events can be found in Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519–1821* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 56–58. See also William E. Dunn, "The Apache Mission on the San Sabá River: Its Founding and Failure," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 17 (Apr. 1914), 367–76. Although Revillagigedo had served nine years, his transfer to Spain was most likely related to the fall of Ensenada. See Christoph Rosenmüller, "Del 'querido amigo' al 'partido antigubernativo,'" 15.

²⁴ Arriaga to Amarillas (copy), June 30, 1755, capítulo 8, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1933B; Kueth and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World, 195–197*, 201–202, 212.

²⁵ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 164–165. To make matters worse, the French intruded into the area previously through an extensive trade network among the native peoples. See Francis X. Galán, *Los Adaes: The First Capital of Spanish Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2020), 142–149.

²⁶ Amarillas to Arriaga, Mexico City, Mar. 14, 1756, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 329. See also Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 63–86.

role in this action on the Trinity. As expressed in Amarillas's instructions to Governor Barrios,

I order Your Excellency ... to take the most opportune and expeditious measures to put into practice all that has been decided ... in the selection of the thirty soldiers commanded by a lieutenant ... to occupy the terrain where the three Frenchmen and two Blacks were captured ... Your Excellency ... should proceed with the construction of the new presidio with which the specified district should be occupied. To administer the holy sacraments to the garrison and to concurrently seek the spiritual conquest of the Indians ... two missionaries will be provided.²⁷

Governor Barrios established Presidio San Agustín de Ahumada during the summer of 1756. Later that same year, a mission, Nuestra Señora de la Luz, was founded, but the civilian settlement never materialized.²⁷

While the occupation of the lower Trinity advanced, Viceroy Amarillas built upon the achievements of Revillagigedo to establish a military base on the San Sabá to counter possible French expansion in the northwest. This undertaking mirrored the same priorities. Amarillas referred the findings of Pedro Rábago's expedition to his *Junta de Guerra y Hacienda* (War and Treasury) in early 1756. Accepting his report, the *junta* approved the transfer of San Xavier's garrison into Apache territory, to the site that he had identified on the San Sabá, and, as Galván had advised, this fifty-man force was intended to be strengthened to one hundred. Twenty-two more soldiers would be brought from San Antonio, while the rest were to be recruited.²⁸ New missions would eventually follow, but the military constituted the vanguard. Meanwhile, the neophytes, formerly from San Xavier, but now dwelling on the San Marcos River, should be transferred to the San Antonio missions. The *junta* hoped for commerce and communications with Santa Fe as well as possible exploitation of mineral resources in the area. On May 18, 1756, Amarillas ordered the *junta's* findings implemented. Moreover, owing to the untimely death of Pedro Rábago, he named Colonel Diego Ortiz Parrilla as interim commander.²⁹

Spanish plans in northwest Texas were ambitious to say the least. The San Sabá *presidio* would anchor the beginning of a defense line and communications network stretching from San Antonio to Santa Fe. The breadth of this assignment explains the expansion of the garrison to one hundred men. Eventually, *presidios*

²⁷ Amarillas to Governor Jacinto de Barrios y Jáuregui, Mexico City, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 329. From the start, missionaries encountered difficult environmental challenges to inhabiting the location, which, evidently, also discouraged civilian settlement. Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 165–166. It should also be remembered that the Louisiana cession came just years later, changing the geopolitical landscape.

²⁸ Altamira to Ortiz Parrilla, Mexico City, Feb. 27, 1756, AGI, Contaduría, leg. 839. This step reduced the San Antonio garrison to just twenty-one men. Jesús F. de la Teja, *San Antonio de Béjar: a Community on New Spain's Northern Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 19.

²⁹ Proceedings, Junta de Guerra y Hacienda, Mexico City, 1756, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 197 and proceedings, Council of the Indies, Madrid, July 8, 1758, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 83. See also Bolton, *Texas*, 83–84; Dunn, "Apache Mission," 385–88. Concerns about disease and a lack of good water had led to the transfer of the troops to the San Marcos River by this time.

from Coahuila would be brought north to fill the gap between San Sabá and Santa Fe. Through a royal order on October 15, 1758, Arriaga approved the new establishment, which, of course, already existed by then. The order, closely echoing the decision of the viceroy's 1756 junta, summarized succinctly the thinking in Madrid:

Take the appropriate measures ... to extract from the San Antonio de Béjar Presidio twenty-two soldiers who are not needed, and, recruiting another twenty-seven, the [garrison of the] new presidio --already having fifty—should reach the precise strength of 100 men; and transfer all the subdued Indians with their missionaries from the District of San Xavier to the security of the Béjar Presidio with the five missions that it protects ... The missionaries should remain [there] or establish another three [missions] in the district of San Sabá, whose location is *not only advantageous for my royal crown* but also the spiritual conquest of the many savage nations that dwell between the Kingdom of New Mexico and the Province of Texas, these nations penetrating to Coahuila, impeding communications and direct passage between the Kingdom and the Province. Once the conquest of the land between them is achieved, some of the presidios that are on the Coahuila frontier will be able to move north, and as a result the presidios and inhabitants of the Kingdom and the Province might enjoy more frequent communication and end the hostilities with these nations in eastern New Mexico and in the west of the Province of Texas.³⁰

Meanwhile, the Council of the Indies ordered the 6,000 pesos that had been provided to Captain Felipe Rábago for the construction of the *presidio* at San Xavier, but never used, to be spent on the fortification on the San Sabá.³¹ Owing to an obvious want of geographic knowledge about the region, the viceroy would retain direct control over the San Sabá post on the grounds that it lay where the governors of Texas, New Mexico, and Coahuila could not clearly claim jurisdiction, compelling the adoption of the compromise that Galván had recommended originally.³²

The emphasis on converting hostile Indians in the royal order of October 15, 1758, and the absence of direct reference to the French are not surprising. Legislation issued through the Council of the Indies and the Ministry involving Texas and New Mexico would surely attract the attention of Versailles's ambassador to Madrid, who would not welcome a military advance on the Texas frontier.³³ Verbal emphasis on the missions, moreover, provided a kind of moral

³⁰ Royal order, Villaviciosa, Oct. 15, 1758, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 83. Corroboration can be found in the autos assembled for the establishment of the San Sabá presidio, Sept. 20, 1763, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1933A. Italics added for emphasis by the authors.

³¹ Report of the *fiscal*, Council of the Indies, Feb. 21, 1758, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 197 and leg. 71. The soldiers at San Xavier had been reduced to living in crude, temporary shelters. Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 367.

³² Dunn, "Apache Mission," 389. Curiously, Father Alonso Giraldo Terreros argued that, owing to its distance from San Antonio, Los Adaes, Coahuila, and New Mexico, the San Sabá complex should be constituted as a separate province! Giraldo de Terreros to Ortiz Parrilla, Queretaro, Feb. 7, 1757, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1933A.

³³ During this period, the French ambassadors to Madrid provided a steady stream of surprisingly well-informed reports to Versailles on colonial policy. Archives des Affaires Étrangères: Correspondance Politique Espagne, vols. 444-540.

cover in an age when the transition to a more secular orientation in royal policy was still evolving. For Madrid and Mexico City, despite their lip service to the impressive zeal of the Franciscan friars, the “spiritual conquest” was secondary to their more pressing military concerns. For purposes of perspective, it is worth noting that the crown pursued a similar policy in Guayana to secure the Amazonian flank of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, where French adventurism raised concerns similar to those on the Louisiana frontier.³⁴

As early as Herbert E. Bolton, historians have been aware that the authorities hoped to connect San Antonio with Santa Fe via San Sabá, but they uniformly regarded that goal as secondary to missionary concerns, treating it as an afterthought that simply entailed commerce and communications. In his 1964 landmark work on *Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá*, Weddle sustained the prevailing belief that missionary zeal was the primary force generating interest in a mission to the Apaches, although he pointed the way to a deeper understanding of the viceroy’s decision to locate the *presidio* and mission on the San Sabá when he added territorial concerns as a compelling consideration.³⁵ He concluded, “Trouble with the Apaches and the Franciscan missionaries’ vision of ending the trouble by making them Christians were by no means the only considerations in the establishment of the Mission,” adding “Spain’s pride, her desire to expand her empire, and her attempts to defend the vast domain she already possessed were to be equally important.”³⁶ Missing in Weddle’s assessment was an appreciation for the primacy of military concerns at this point in the evolution of frontier policy.

The Franciscans had long desired a mission to the Apaches. Hopes intensified when, under deadly military pressure from Comanches to the north, they displayed a new openness to Spanish overtures and when, at San Antonio in 1749, some tribal leaders signed a treaty with the Spanish authorities. Growing concern over a common enemy helped bridge the cultural gap.³⁷ Predictably, the friars interpreted the Apaches’ behavior as indicating a desire to hear their message, and they began to consider the possible locations for such an enterprise while seeking the means to support it. Franciscans hoped to penetrate the lands controlled by the eastern or Lipan Apaches but nevertheless remain reasonably close to the security offered by San Antonio. Locations on the Pedernales River

³⁴ See Manuel Lucena Giraldo, *Laboratorio tropical: la expedición de límites al Orinoco, 1750–1767* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1993), 87–92, 188–196.

³⁵ Bolton, *Texas*, 83–84; Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 154–155; Weddle, *San Sabá*, 26, 151–154. Regarding the importance of missionary zeal, Weddle asserted, “The Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá and the Presidio de San Luis de las Amarillas finally came into being, the products of the love and the understanding of Father Santa Ana, the son of Saint Francis.” Weddle, *San Sabá*, 17.

³⁶ Weddle, *San Sabá*, 5. Of lesser but some importance, advocates of the San Sabá location also claimed that valuable mineral deposits could be found close to the river. *Ibid.*, 22. Writing in 1914, Dunn made similar points. See Dunn, “Apache Mission,” 386.

³⁷ For the interplay between the Spanish and the Apaches at this time, see Thomas A. Britten, *The Lipan Apaches: People of Wind and Lightning* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009), 91–94. Juliana Barr, in *Peace Came in the Form of a Woman: Indians and Spaniards in the Texas Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 174–177, illuminates the complexities of this relationship.

or the upper extension of the Guadalupe, both close to large Apache populations, had the friars' strong support.³⁸ But Viceroy Revillagigedo, in harmony with the mood in Madrid, had other ideas. His objectives, regalist in spirit, were primarily military. Strategic concerns explain both why the *presidio* was built so far to the northwest, on the outer edge of Apache lands and well beyond what the friars had envisioned, and why, even after the mission had been destroyed, the crown retained, indeed upgraded, that structure and sustained its assignment.

Accordingly, military and missionary objectives operated separately in the San Sabá advance. It was not at all clear initially where the funding for the missionary endeavor would originate, but the friars secured an independent backer in 1756: Pedro Romero de Terreros. A wealthy miner, Romero offered to fund the missions for the Apaches for three years, but only if his cousin, Fray Alonso Giraldo de Terreros, was named as the director. As Weddle observed, "The Terreros plan was developed independently of the San Sabá plan, but when the Viceroy's advisors received the Terreros proposal they recommended that the two be combined."³⁹

The missionaries were surely pleased to have funding for their long-awaited mission to the Apaches, but, thanks to the new regalist orientation of royal policy and the strategic concerns at play, they found themselves relegated to a supporting role. Indeed, Colonel Ortiz Parrilla, who saw the missionary objective as an unnecessary impediment, objected to including the friars at all, at least during the initial period. Events soon proved him correct, but the viceroy, swayed by the private funding that he had secured for evangelization, held fast. Nevertheless, although the crown initially authorized three missions, as it had at San Xavier, the Franciscans would build only one when the time came to act. Moreover, three of the friars, frustrated by marginality, soon returned in disgust to their college in Querétaro.⁴⁰

Given the magnitude of the Spanish response, questions arise about the actual extent of the French menace to Texas. On the surface, Louisiana was a weak neighbor and not a serious threat. Indeed, when seen in an imperial context, the colony was of only minor importance to Versailles, and it suffered from chronic neglect.⁴¹ Moreover, after the Second Family Compact dissolved at the end of the War of the Austrian Succession, the French thinking in Louisiana

³⁸ Weddle, *San Sabá*, 20. Useful maps of Apache lands can be found in Britten, *Lipan Apaches*, 57, 110.

³⁹ Weddle, *San Sabá*, 40–41. Born in Spain and educated at Salamanca, Romero de Terreros had amassed a fortune in New Spain. Eventually, Charles III ennobled him as the Conde de Santa María de la Regla. See Juan M. Romero de Terreros Castilla, "San Sabá, misión para los Apaches: el plan Terreros para consolidar la frontera norte de Nueva España (Madrid: Delegación en Corte, Real Sociedad Bascongada de los Amigos del País, 2000), 24–44. Military escorts for the missions were detached from the *presidio* garrison and funded through the army. Proceedings, Council of the Indies, July 8, 1758, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 83.

⁴⁰ Dunn, "Apache Mission," 396–400. Romero de Terreros Castilla, *El plan Terreros*, 67. The Apaches, despite their many assurances, failed to behave as the missionaries hoped. See Weddle, *San Sabá*, 53–60. In reality, it is doubtful that the methods the Franciscans had developed for sedentary populations promised much success with the Apaches. See Thomas F. McGovern, "The Role of the Franciscans in the Expansion of the Northern Frontier of New Spain, 1525–1760" (M.A. Thesis, Texas Technological College, 1969), 89–94.

⁴¹ Daniel H. Usner Jr., *Indians, Settlers, & Slaves in a Frontier Exchange Economy: The Lower Mississippi Valley before 1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 4–5, 78–80.

was mostly defensive. Its principal military concerns lay with Indian tribes to its north and east, and with the pressure that the English mounted through them.⁴² That orientation intensified in 1754 when the French established Fort Duquesne where the Allegheny and Monongahela rivers join to form the Ohio River, thus asserting their claim to the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains. Evidently, the military buildup in North America preceding that action triggered the intelligence reports that alarmed Revillagigedo. New Orleans received eight hundred reinforcements in 1750, apparently in connection with that same development, adding to Ensenada's concerns over Texas and New Mexico. These troops, however, were not aimed at Spanish Texas. Diplomatic realities could change but, for the moment, the Natchitoches garrison on the Texas frontier numbered just forty-five men, slightly smaller than the Spanish force at Los Adaes.⁴

Louisiana's marginality does not, of course, mean that Versailles disdained the advances in exploration, trade, or even territory that its subjects there might secure. French soldiers from Natchitoches, for example, slipped across the Red River in 1734 to fortify a position on the west bank in what amounted to a seizure of land that the Spanish considered theirs. The feeble Los Adaes garrison failed to respond, but Governor Carlos Franquis reported the encroachment to Ensenada in a powerful exposé regarding the "miserable condition of the Province of Texas."⁴⁴ Moreover, it will be recalled that, in 1754, Spanish forces apprehended advance agents plotting the establishment of a colony on the lower Trinity. Worrisome, too, was the stream of French trading expeditions through the north country to New Mexico, some of them sponsored by the authorities in New Orleans. The relations that these merchants cultivated with the natives were enough to raise concern that territory left unoccupied might be lost to French opportunism.⁴⁵ To the Spanish, the French were always, as Ensenada wrote, trying "to advance ... at our expense," and there were enough examples of such adventurism to justify concern. Encroachments of these sorts, though minor, carried enough weight to provoke a Spanish response. After Louisbourg fell to the British in 1758 during the Seven Years' War, the French obviously

⁴² For example, Governor Pierre Rigaud de Vaudreuil to the Secretary of the Navy, New Orleans, Sept. 16, 1749, Nov. 1, 1750, May 2, 1752, and Governor Chevalier de Kerlérec to the Secretary of the Navy, New Orleans, June 26, 1755, Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer, Secrétariat d'Etat à la Marine, Correspondance a l'arrivée en provenance de la Louisiane (hereinafter ANO, SEM, CL). French governors' reports during these years repeatedly express concerns about Indian troubles and the English.

⁴³ Ensenada to Eslava, Aranjuez, May 14, 1752, AGS, GM, leg. 6799; Vaudreuil to the Secretary of Marine, New Orleans, May 21, 1751, Sept. 27, Kerlérec to the Secretary of Marine, New Orleans, Aug. 20, 1753, ANO, SEM, CL; Usner, *Indians, Settlers, Slaves*, 225; *Reglamento para todos los presidios de las Provincias Internas...* (Madrid, n.p., 1729), in AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 144.

⁴⁴ Allan J. Kuethe, "Carlos Franquis y las 'noticias secretas' de Texas," *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia* 218 (May–Aug. 2021), 547–549; Carlos Franquis Benítez de Lugo, *Informa el miserable estado de la Provincia de Texas*, May 21, 1746, AGI, Mexico, leg. 2446.

⁴⁵ For useful summaries of this activity, see Henry Folmer, *Franco-Spanish Rivalry in North America, 1524–1763* (Glendale, CA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1953), 297–303; Bolton, *Texas*, 66–77. The initial breakthrough was pioneered by the Mallet expedition, which reached Santa Fe in 1739 via the Platte River.

faced more than they could handle in Canada, and Madrid took a more realistic view of its relations with Versailles and London.⁴⁶ By that time, however, Spain's push into northwest Texas had already occurred.

Indians were, of course, another major concern. The formidable Comanches, who had emerged as the dominant force on the Southern Plains during the first half of the century, had become increasingly dangerous. Featuring highly mobile horsemen bearing modern weapons largely secured from French traders, they penetrated well into what is modern Texas. Moreover, the Taovayas, of the Wichita confederation, allied with the Comanches, as did the Tonkawas and Hasinains. They were all enemies of the Apaches.⁴⁷ Together, these peoples would significantly complicate Madrid's ambitious San Sabá operation to arrest French penetration into Texas.

The joint military and missionary expedition arrived on the San Sabá in April 1757. Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas and Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá were established about three to four miles apart and on opposite sides of the river. Wary Apaches, apparently fearful that the mission lay too close to Comanche territory, kept their distance.⁴⁸ Indeed, less than a year later, on March 16, 1758, Indians, principally Taovayas and Comanches, apparently angry about the Spaniards' new-found commitment to their hated rival, destroyed the mission before the *presidio* garrison could respond, killing two friars and at least six others, including neophytes and escort soldiers. A year and a half later, this outrage prompted Colonel Ortiz Parrilla's impressive punitive expedition of 380 soldiers and militia, with a host of Indian allies, to the Red River to punish the Taovayas.⁴⁹

Ortiz Parrilla's march had an uncertain impact. Weddle originally believed that he failed, leading to the eventual abandonment of the *presidio* at San Sabá.⁵⁰ However, his subsequent discovery of the diary of Captain Juan Ángel de Oyarzún, who served with Ortiz Parrilla, and close rereading of other documents, led him to revise his earlier findings in a second volume published in 2007. Weddle now found that the Spanish, although far from scoring a clear-cut victory with their impressive expedition against the Taovayas and their allies, had essentially accomplished enough to justify the action. The Red River

⁴⁶ Escudero, *Los orígenes del Consejo de Ministros en España, Vol. I*, 175. For the evolution of Minister of State Ricardo Wall's thinking, see Diego Téllez Alarcia, *El ministerio Wall: La "España discreta" del "ministro olvidado"* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2012), 79–124.

⁴⁷ Pekka Hämäläinen, *The Comanche Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 18–67.

⁴⁸ David La Vere wrote, "In reality, the mission was in a bad location. It was too far north, putting the Apaches directly in the line of Comanche attacks. So no Apaches greeted the missionaries when they arrived and few, if any, stayed at the mission once it became operational." *The Texas Indians* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 142.

⁴⁹ Weddle, *After the Massacre: The Violent Legacy of the San Sabá Mission* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007). The total number of victims may have reached twelve. See Britten, *Lipan Apaches*, 105, and Weddle, *San Sabá*, part II.

⁵⁰ Weddle, *San Sabá*, 118–143. As Weddle later explained in his foreword to *The San Sabá Papers: A Documentary Account of the Founding and the Destruction of San Sabá Mission*, ed. by Lesley Byrd Simpson, trans. by Daniel D. Nathan (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2000), viii, "Ultimately, it (the defeat) meant a withdrawal from San Sabá and other far-flung Spanish settlements to form a defensive line paralleling the present international boundary with Mexico."

campaign, he concluded, “was not the ignominious failure it was portrayed to be; if the Spaniards lost the battle, the Taovayas were not claiming victory.” “Its importance,” he argued, “lies in the impact it had on Spain’s colonial effort—its reemphasis of the altered circumstances, first seen in the Norteños’ assault on the Mission Santa Cruz de San Sabá. As long as the Spaniards held the advantage in weaponry—firearms against bows and arrows, pikes, and wooden clubs—the Indians were easily defeated. Now the tables had turned; victory and valor did not come as easily when the enemy held the advantage.” In 1767, he concluded, “instead of maintaining a Spanish presence on the extended border, [the Marques de] Rubí urged withdrawal to a new and more realistic defense line.”⁵¹ Weddle’s impressive work was correct as far as it went, but much more was involved.

At this point, Captain Felipe Rábago reappeared, taking charge of the garrison at Presidio San Luis on October 1, 1760. The former commander of the San Xavier *presidio*, Rábago was probably the most controversial figure in colonial Texas. Well-connected in Mexico and Spain, he was a native of the village of Tresabuela, in the northern Spanish province of Santander. His older brother was chief accountant in the royal mint, his uncle had been governor of Coahuila, and he, while still in his twenties, had accumulated a small fortune in Mexico City’s trade with Zacatecas, the prosperous mining center in the north. Moreover, Rábago had a very important family connection at court in the person of the king’s Jesuit confessor.⁵²

On the surface, Captain Rábago undeniably seems to be a disagreeable villain. While commanding at San Xavier, his arrogance and high-handed regalism had led to repeated conflicts with Franciscan missionaries and others. Moreover, as indicated earlier, when a double murder occurred on his watch, with one of the victims a prominent clerical enemy, suspicion fell upon him. Apart from the complications arising from that crime, the most grievous charges against him—and the ones that have drawn much attention from historians—were those of egregious sexual misconduct, according to the friars’ complaints. In that context, as explained earlier, Viceroy Revillagigedo in late 1752 transferred Rábago to command Presidio Santa Rosa de Sacramento in north central Coahuila, a safe distance from San Xavier. Following the fall of Ensenada and the departure of his kinsman from court, Captain Rábago’s residence in Coahuila became confinement, including actual imprisonment for a year during 1756–1757, although he had not been convicted of any crime.⁵³

In 1760, however, despite the troubling circumstances, the viceroy

⁵¹ Weddle, *After the Massacre*, 47, 49. Weddle was speaking of the defensive line against the Indians, not the French.

⁵² Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 149; Chipman and López Elizondo, “New Light,” 162–163, 169–170.

⁵³ Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 318–119; Chipman and López Elizondo, “New Light,” 165–166, 169–170. Powerful local connections in Mexico enabled Rábago to escape further imprisonment if not detention. Serrano Álvarez, “Cabildo y presidios en Texas en los tiempos de Felipe Rábago,” in Manuela Cristina García Bernal and Sandra Olivero Guidobono, eds., *El municipio indiano: relaciones interétnicas, económicas y sociales, Homenaje a Luis Navarro García* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2009), 388–391.

transferred Captain Rábago to command at San Sabá, where he arrived in September. Rábago's assignment to San Sabá has befuddled historians over the years, especially since he displaced Colonel Ortiz Parrilla, who, it will be recalled, led the expedition to punish the Indians allegedly responsible for the San Sabá massacre. As Chipman and López Elizondo commented, "The circumstances that prompted the release and reassignment of a person of such questionable reputation to the largest military garrison in Texas are little short of remarkable."⁵⁴ To explain this radical change in Rábago's fortunes, a measure of caution is in order regarding his character and suitability for command.

The shrill voices raised against the captain came overwhelmingly from the friars, who denounced his sinful behavior. They, however, are suspect as credible witnesses when their behavior is analyzed within a larger context. During this period, as discussed above, the regular orders were under siege from the strong regalist current sweeping Madrid, as Enlightenment ideals, with their secular perspectives, influenced thinking in the royal administration, with adverse consequences for the regular orders. The new mood had become manifest when Ensenada launched his controversial campaign to secularize mission parishes in America during 1749 and the early 1750s in what was the first of several anticlerical reforms of the Spanish Bourbons. In an impoverished frontier region like Texas, there was nothing to secularize, of course; but the fathers, accustomed to the deference traditionally accorded them as equal partners of the state, chafed under the harsh treatment they received, not only from Rábago but several of the governors.⁵⁵

Moreover, the Church saw its corporate privileges, as defined by the *fuero eclesiástico*, wither. One of the grievances against Rábago, for example, was for his violation of the custom of ecclesiastical sanctuary when he rode his horse into a mission church to capture an escaped prisoner. Unthinkable in an earlier age, this sort of "outrage" was no longer unique.⁵⁶ Friars reacted angrily, self-righteously, and defensively to such transgressions, and they fought by whatever means possible against those who endangered their honored position in the colonial hierarchy. Rábago, who expected subordination and treated them without the respect that they expected, stood at the top of their enemies list. Their complaint about him to their home College of Querétaro is most revealing: "the indecent rage of Don Carlos de Franquis, the impostures of [Pedro de] Barrios (sic), the craft[iness] of Don Jacinto [de Barrios y Jáuregui], the plots of the [Canary] Islanders, the machinations of Don Juachín (sic) [Orobio y Basterra] and the entanglement of the provinces, all combined, are outdone by the malice of this man."⁵⁷ The friars, it seems, had many detractors, but one ranked above all the others.

⁵⁴ Chipman and López Elizondo, "New Light," 161; Weddle, *After the Massacre*, 40.

⁵⁵ Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 167–193; Kuethe, "Carlos Franquis," 550–555, 572.

⁵⁶ Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 319; Nancy M. Farriss, *Crown and Clergy in Colonial Mexico, 1759–1821: The Crisis of Ecclesiastical Privilege* (London: University of London, 1968).

⁵⁷ This quotation, January 12, 1752, was cited and translated by Bolton, *Texas*, 253, and later appeared in Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 320–321, and Starnes, *San Gabriel Missions*, n.p.

To state the obvious, pioneering historians of mid eighteenth-century Texas depended uncritically upon heavily biased Franciscan sources to explain events, and that perspective carried into their writings. Fray Morfi, the Franciscan friar who produced the earliest account during the early 1780s, set the tone. His condemnation of Felipe Rábago was unequivocal: “From the very first day on which he set foot in these (San Xavier) missions, he used all his powers to destroy them in order to satisfy his infamous and scandalous vices ... lust, selfishness, cruelty, and unbearable pride were the dominating passions ... [Governor Jacinto de Barrios y Jáuregui’s] hatred for the missionaries encouraged Rábago to scorn them, and his natural pride carried him to the extremes of contempt.” Carlos E. Castañeda translated and edited Morfi, and he certainly shared his perspective. Moreover, Castañeda depended heavily upon Franciscan documentation for his monumental seven-volume work, *Our Catholic Heritage in Texas, 1519-1936*, which he published under the aegis of the Knights of Columbus Historical Commission. His sympathy for the friars was apparent when he complained of the “sordid and malignant persecution of the perfidious Rábago.”⁵⁸

Writing earlier in the twentieth century, Herbert E. Bolton was more circumspect, but he also strayed very little from the path defined by the friars. More recently, Robert S. Weddle in his highly influential work depended greatly upon Castañeda when discussing, as he put it, “the steps leading up to the founding of the San Sabá Mission.” Accordingly, his characterization of Rábago mirrored both Castañeda and Morfi, and, in his account, the captain’s alleged moral shortcomings contributed greatly to the failure of the San Xavier undertaking.⁵⁹ Regarding Rábago’s character, then, very little original thinking has occurred since Morfi.

Reservations about the relative worth of the clerical testimony levied against Captain Rábago should not lead to the conclusion that the sons of Saint Francis lacked either rectitude or moral zeal, but it is worth remembering that their outcries occurred at a time of uncertainty and stress, when the socio-political order to which they were accustomed was changing, and not in their favor. Hence, while the friars’ protests against Rábago should be taken seriously, they require corroboration before being given too much credibility. Fortunately, the testimony of Governor Barrios, himself a harsh critic of the friars, is helpful. When characterizing Rábago in a confidential observation to the viceroy, he remarked that “Your Excellency is aware that wealth and rank gained with little experience destroy those who possess them,” and then described the captain’s self-centered character.⁶⁰ Thus, while prudence demands that Franciscan testimony not be blindly accepted at face value, Rábago obviously was flawed, but perhaps not as hopelessly as the friars portrayed him.

In 2007, Donald E. Chipman, in collaboration with Luis López Elizondo and

⁵⁸ Morfi, *History of Texas*, part 2, p. 330; Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 320.

⁵⁹ Bolton, *Texas*, 93-94, 244-262; Weddle, *San Sabá*, 18, 31-34.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Weddle, *After the Massacre*, 44. See also Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 149-150.

with the support of Weddle, published an impressive article in the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* that brought the Rábago story into a clearer focus and did much to explain his initial appointment to San Xavier and then, after he was discredited, his subsequent redemption. Regarding the latter, the authors showed why interim Viceroy Francisco Cagigal de la Vega, in reviewing his case, found that the weight of the evidence exonerated Rábago of the two murders of which he had been accused. But Chipman and López Elizondo nevertheless echoed earlier indictments of the man's character, describing him as a man "apparently undeterred by a single scruple."⁶¹

Chipman and López Elizondo were correct in concluding that in the San Xavier appointment "family connections figured importantly." It would, nevertheless, be helpful to expand upon the point. Soon after the French betrayal of their obligations under the Family Compact during the closing years of the War of the Austrian Succession, Ferdinand replaced his French confessor with Francisco de Rábago. Chipman and López Elizondo argue that Francisco was not actually the uncle of Felipe, as most historians have assumed. Nevertheless, he was surely connected to him by family as indicated by their surnames, and, in any case, he was the patriarch of Tresabuella, from which the Rábagos operating in New Spain hailed. Father Rábago quickly became a major power at court, a confidant of Secretary of State Carvajal y Lancaster, and an ally of Ensenada, who, despite his anticlericalism, was an ardent admirer of the Jesuits. Together, the three men formed a governing triumvirate known as "the Jesuit party." It was no coincidence that the man who, during 1748-1755, commanded the expedition that colonized the area below Bahía on the coastal rim of New Spain, José de Escandón y Helguera, came from Santander.⁶² Nor is it surprising that a son of that same province and Father Rábago's home village was selected to lead the other effort to thwart the French, at San Xavier.

Upon reflection, Rábago's exile to Santa Rosa de Sacramento in 1752 bears a remarkable similarity to the fate of Governor Carlos Franquis Bénitez de Lugo, who likewise found himself in a turbulent relationship with the Franciscans and was charged by the friars with sexual abuses, albeit less serious. Largely owing to their protests, he too was banished to a distant *presidio* pending a full investigation. But there was a major difference. Franquis, who had influence at court, was fearless, and he simply ignored the order to remain at San Juan Bautista in Coahuila, transferring instead to Mexico City to confront the viceroy. He was quickly exonerated.⁶³ As for Rábago, his support in Madrid disappeared with the coup of July 20, 1754, during which British Ambassador Benjamin

⁶¹ Chipman and López, "New Light," 160-181 (quotation on p. 172).

⁶² Ibid., 162-63; Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 178, 201. Other family members included his brother, José, the chief accountant of the royal mint, and his uncle Pedro, governor of Coahuila and Felipe's replacement after his removal.

⁶³ The charges appeared in the "testimony" against Carlos Franquis, 1737-1738, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 103. See also Kuethe, "Carlos Franquis," 555-58.

Keene conspired with pro-British elements at court to oust Ensenada.⁶⁴ And Father Rábago left the court as well.

Felipe Rábago languished eight years at Presidio Sacramento and at various other points of detention. Finally, he was permitted to post a 4,000-peso bond and journey to Mexico City, where in late 1759 he appeared for a hearing before interim Viceroy Cagigal de la Vega. The weight of evidence easily exonerated him, but it is also worth noting that Cagigal had risen under Ensenada. In dismissing the flimsy case against Rábago, the viceroy declared him “rightfully absolved of all offenses, charges, damages, and loss of reputation as used against him,” and he ordered the captain to be “restored to the employee of his majesty and transferred to the Río de San Sabá where command of *his company* shall be handed over to him.”⁶⁵ Originally, Rábago’s detachment to Santa Rosa had been temporary and, administratively, he remained *propietario* of his company, which now served at Presidio San Luis.⁶⁶ Cagigal clearly did not view Captain Rábago’s personal flaws as an impediment to his ability to resume his command. Colonel Ortiz Parrilla was named governor of Coahuila, a more appropriate assignment since ordinarily a colonel would not command a mere company. As for Rábago’s accusers, the viceroy found grievous malfeasance in their investigation of the crimes.⁶⁷

Developments at court and their chronology explain much about Rábago’s change of fortune. When Ferdinand VI died at Villaviciosa on August 10, 1759, following a long illness, he was succeeded by his half-brother, Charles III, the son of Elizabeth Farnese, Philip’s second wife, and king of the Two Sicilies. On February 13, 1759, Charles had issued a proclamation from Caserta, Italy, naming Elizabeth as regent should the king die, pending his own transfer to Spain. Thus, upon Ferdinand’s death, Elizabeth took the reins of government in Madrid. While governing previously during periods when Philip’s fragile health required it, she had depended greatly upon Ensenada, whom she admired. Under her regency, although Ensenada was in exile, his party had an ear at court and much changed, including the politics of New Spain, as seen by the improving fortunes of Captain Rábago. When Charles reached court in December 1759, he summoned Ensenada to Madrid and elevated him to the Council of State.

⁶⁴ Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 209–212; Gómez Urdáñez, *El marqués*, 232–236.

⁶⁵ Serrano Álvarez, “Cabildo y presidios,” 387–390; Chipman and López Elizondo, “New Light,” 161, 174–176 (quotation; emphasis added by the authors). Cagigal served Ensenada well. As governor of Santiago de Cuba, he skillfully frustrated the British invasion of 1742. Accordingly, Ensenada named Cagigal governor of Havana when he promoted Revillagigedo to viceroy, and he temporarily succeeded Amarillas when he died in February 1760. See Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 151–152.

⁶⁶ “Se mantiene el propietario de éste (San Xavier);” Pedro Rábago to Revillagigedo, San Francisco Xavier de Gigedo, Sept. 12, 1754, in the *auto* of Don Pedro de Rabago y Terán concerning his appointment..., 1748–1763, AGI, Mexico [transcription in Box 2Q148, vol. 91 (1748–1763), Part 1, 184–209, DT, DBCAH].

⁶⁷ Bolton, *Texas*, 93; Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 149; Chipman and López Elizondo, “New Light,” 175–176. During the hearing, the truth emerged that much if not all the testimony against Rábago came from people with personal interests in bringing him down. His 4,000-peso bail (*finanza*), paid in Cuernavaca, came from Gabriel Gutierrez de Terán, apparently a cousin. “Cuaderno,” proceedings against Rábago, Mexico, 1759–60, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1690.

As a severe critic of the Jesuits, Charles did not, however, bring back Father Rábago.⁶⁸ But in New Spain, the fate of Captain Rábago was another matter.

Rábago severely criticized his substitute, Ortiz Parrilla, and his expedition to the Red River, and in so doing he planted the misconceptions that later led historians to misunderstand the true nature of what had occurred. Weddle believed that Rábago schemed to promote himself at the expense of his predecessor:

The origin of the 'bad press' given the [Red River] campaign has been slow to emerge, but evidence at last comes forth of a slander campaign against its leader by none other than Felipe de Rábago y Terán ... Rábago's bitterness grew during his eight years under a cloud. Ultimately, it came to rest on Ortiz Parrilla, who had taken his former garrison and incorporated into that of San Sabá; hence the besmirching of the Red River campaign and Ortiz Parrilla himself.

There is undoubtedly much truth to Weddle's observation. Indeed, enhancing one's stature by belittling a predecessor's achievements was a time-honored practice in the rough culture of Spanish colonial administration.⁶⁹ While that tactic may have misled historians, however, it was unlikely to have fooled an experienced administrator like Cagigal. Rábago's restoration came when the new regime in Madrid amended the politics of its predecessor. Succeeding Cagigal, Viceroy Marqués de Cruillas confirmed that change.

Presidio San Luis survived well after Indians destroyed Santa Cruz de San Sabá, which confirms that its objective went beyond protecting the mission. Indeed, not only did the complex continue to function, it flourished under Captain Felipe Rábago, at least for a while. In his orders for establishing the *presidio*, Viceroy Amarillas also envisioned building a civilian community. Some 237 women and children accompanied the garrison to the San Sabá. These people were mostly the families of soldiers, but they likely intended to stay. Moreover, the expedition brought large herds of cattle and sheep. As Weddle wrote, "The Spaniards had planned the Mission and Presidio of San Saba as a base from which to penetrate the Great Plains. They had visualized, first, the development of a thriving town, then of the entire region, and, second, the establishment of trade routes across the Plains country to New Mexico after the country to the north and the west had been explored." The process was underway to create a new center of Spanish power.⁷⁰

Weddle attributed the decision to retain the *presidio* to Spanish pride: "After the Mission was destroyed, it seemed reasonable to abolish the *presidio*, since it

⁶⁸ Kuethe and Andrien, *Spanish Atlantic World*, 159, 215–216; Gómez Urdáñez, *El marqués*, 217–218. Charles would expel the Jesuits from his realms in 1767.

⁶⁹ Weddle, *After the Massacre*, 37–38. A handy demonstration can be found in the final reports of the viceroys of New Granada. See E. Posada and P.M. Ibañez, eds., *Relaciones de mando: memorias presentadas por los gobernantes del Nuevo Reino de Granada* (Bogotá: Academia Colombiana de Historia, 1910).

⁷⁰ Dumm, "Apache Mission," 391, 395, 403; Bolton, *Texas*, 86; Weddle, *San Sabá*, 103. The viceregal order to establish the complex specifically expressed the objective of developing a town and the region economically.

no longer had a mission to protect. But the matter of prestige was involved. To withdraw would have been to admit defeat, with considerable loss of Spanish prestige among the Apaches and the enemy northern tribes.⁷¹ This insight into local thinking has validity, but more was involved. Realistically, the sting of wounded pride diminished the farther removed an official found himself from the Texas frontier. Indeed, for the gentlemen who sat about His Majesty's council tables at Court, their wigs nicely powdered, sipping their morning chocolate or afternoon sherry, pride in the face of a marginal Indian tribe on the periphery of the American empire could not have been a major concern. But the French rivalry was.

For purposes of perspective, the financial records uncovered by the present authors are revealing. In 1760, the crown invested 93,952 silver pesos in San Sabá. That sum was more than sufficient to construct a double-decked ship-of-the-line in Havana.⁷² Much more than pride was at stake. As the largest fortification in the Texas region, with by far the most numerous garrison, Presidio San Luis received the largest *situado* (fund transfer) that Mexico City allocated in Texas, and it was substantial. During its first three years, the *situado* averaged 42,607 pesos annually, which accounted for over thirty five percent of the expenditures on Texas from 1757 to 1759. The allocation of 93,952 pesos for 1760 presumably helped finance the replacement of the post's wooden defenses with an expensive stone wall. Much to his credit, Rábago successfully managed this construction from late 1760 through most of 1761. Given the costs involved, it is understandable that Viceroy Amarillas, with impressive insight, retained direct control over the San Sabá venture, albeit on the grounds that the *presidio* stood where the governors of Texas, New Mexico, and Coahuila could not clearly claim jurisdiction.⁷³

Although Minister of the Indies Arriaga issued the same instructions to incoming Viceroy Cruillas that he gave to Amarillas five years earlier, emphasizing the French menace, concerns about the threat on the Texas border lessened somewhat after Madrid joined Versailles in the Third Family Compact on August 15, 1761, to counter the British advance in North America following James Wolfe's stunning victory at Quebec.⁷⁴ Given the history of the first two Bourbon alliances, however, the Spanish were not disposed to rely on French goodwill or take anything for granted. An indication of Spanish thinking appeared in the

⁷¹ Weddle, *San Sabá*, xi.

⁷² Serrano and Kuethe, "La Texas colonial," 300–301. It cost about 77,000 pesos to construct a sixty-gun ship of the line in Havana. Serrano Álvarez, *El astillero de La Habana en el siglo XVIII: historia y construcción naval (1700–1805)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2018), 71. At this time, the Armada possessed some fifty ships of the line. Kuethe, "La política naval de la monarquía española a fines del antiguo régimen," in Juan Marchena Fernández and Justo Cuño Bonito, eds., *Vientos de guerra: apogeo y crisis de la Real Armada, 1750–1823* (3 vols.; Aranjuez: Universidad Pablo de Olavide, 2018), I: 31.

⁷³ Bolton, *Texas*, 93; Dunn, "Apache Mission," 389.

⁷⁴ The instructions were dated May 20, 1760. See María del Pópulo Antolín Espino, "El virrey marqués de Cruillas," in José Antonio Calderón Quijano, ed., *Los virreyes de Nueva España en el reinado de Carlos III, Volume I* (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1967), 11–12.

negotiations leading to the Family Compact, when Madrid insisted repeatedly that Versailles guarantee it a definite settlement concerning the Louisiana boundary. However, because Spain did not agree to an early entrance into the war or provide Versailles with an appropriate loan, the final treaty skirted the issue. Thus, Madrid had no incentive to change course on the Texas frontier. In New Spain, meanwhile, Viceroy Cruillas reaffirmed traditional thinking when Captain Rábago proposed a shift of Spanish forces farther to the south of the San Sabá to protect two missions he had just established closer to San Antonio. Responding on October 1, 1762, Cruillas reminded him that Presidio San Luis served as a strategic link between San Antonio and Santa Fe, impeding any foreign penetration into the area that lay between those two points.⁷⁵

Accordingly, for 1761 and 1762, despite Madrid's growing hostilities with the British and its warming toward the French, the annual allocation for the San Sabá venture averaged 40,545 pesos. In 1763, after Spain's acquisition of Louisiana, that funding momentarily disappeared and, accordingly, priorities shifted toward New Orleans and Havana.⁷⁶ But before the French withdrew from the continent, Presidio San Luis had stood as an important extension of Spanish power, and the authorities had hoped it might become part of a strategic link to Santa Fe. Those objectives did not go unattended.

Revealingly, authorities from both San Sabá and Santa Fe attempted to explore the area between them. In 1755, Arriaga's instructions to incoming Viceroy Marqués de las Amarillas ordered him to secure an "exact map of all that part of New Spain . . . in order to obtain a clear knowledge of the limits and distances that have been impossible to obtain from those that have been sent up to now owing to the small areas that they cover." To find a workable connection between the two strongpoints would advance significantly the objectives for the establishment of Presidio San Luis. Rábago did his part with two expeditions. His first thrust, a limited venture, pushed north, reaching the juncture of the Concho and Colorado rivers. And in 1761, a more ambitious probe sent forty men west. Consuming twenty-four days, the expedition managed to reach the Pecos River, which descends from the mountains near Santa Fe.⁷⁷

From Santa Fe, Governor Tomás Vélez, who had just commissioned a map for New Mexico, launched an intriguing undertaking in 1761. The party included seven Indians led by Francisco Romero, who spoke Apache, and José Antonio Miraval, and it included Francisco's brother, Miguel, and four Indians from the Pecos mission. The governor, who sent along a letter for Captain Rábago, hoped that Francisco Romero, who already had visited San Sabá once, could reach it

⁷⁵ Arthur S. Aiton, "The Diplomacy of the Louisiana Cession," *American Historical Review* 36 (July 1931), 704–706; Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 174–175; Weddle, *San Sabá*, 161.

⁷⁶ Serrano and Kuethe, "La Texas colonial," 301. After the radical dip in 1763, the *situado* returned to normal. Nevertheless, Rubí, who had his own political agenda, claimed that he found the *presidio* in a miserable condition during his review of the installation in 1767. See Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 173, 178.

⁷⁷ Instructions of the Secretary of the Indies to Viceroy of New Spain Marqués de las Amarillas (copy), June 30, 1755, capítulo 8, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1933B; Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 155–156; Weddle, *San Sabá*, 151.

directly from the mission, but the challenge was enormous. Had it been possible to travel in a direct line to the southeast, the distance would have surpassed 450 miles across very rugged terrain. The expedition headed south and southeast, following the Pecos, which eventually led them out of the Rocky Mountains onto the flatlands. After only five days, however, the four mission Indians gave up and returned home. The Apache encampments (*rancherías*) that the explorers encountered received them well, but attitudes soured when their hosts at El Callote became involved in a skirmish with a band of Comanches and Francisco Romero suffered an arrow wound that took three months to heal.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, his brother returned to Santa Fe to update the governor.

Eventually, an Apache guide led Romero and Miraval on a long trek to the southeast, where they found refuge in the camp of Chief Bigotes (Mustache) in the district (*paraje*) of Loma Pinta. At that point, they encountered Captain Manuel Rodríguez from Presidio Junta de los Ríos, located on the Río Grande in Coahuila. Rodríguez, who was looking for stolen horses, took Romero's men to Presidio Santiago de la Monclova, located well below the river, bringing the venture to a frustrating conclusion. Romero probably got no closer than 250 miles to Presidio San Luis.⁷⁹ Still, the expedition showed promise. Its achievement might have been something to build upon, but when the French threat disappeared, circumstances changed. Nevertheless, the probes by Rábago and Vélez show where the strategic thinking stood during those critical years.

Captain Felipe de Rábago emerged as a far different kind of leader as commander of Presidio San Luis. During 1761–1762, on his own initiative, he responded to Apache entreaties by founding two missions on the upper Nueces River, farther south and nearer to San Antonio: San Lorenzo de la Santa Cruz and Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria del Cañón. He supported those establishments with detachments from his *presidio*, albeit at some risk to the northern defense line. Moreover, he spent over 12,000 pesos of his personal funds for food and other provisions for the *presidio* and missions.⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, Franciscan complaints about him ended. Although the French threat was gone, Rábago nevertheless found himself in command of an exposed garrison deployed in hostile territory, which suffered regular, damaging harassment from Indians.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 59, 80. Curiously, the explorers called the Pecos the “Río Puercos,” a name that eventually stuck to a tributary of the Río Grande much farther west. Generally, the Comanches occupied the eastern side of the Pecos, while the Apaches stayed west of the river. Hämäläinen, *Comanche Empire*, 59, 80.

⁷⁹ Report, José Antonio Miraval and Francisco Romero to Viceroy Marqués de Cruillas via Interim Governor Lorenzo Cansio, Santiago de la Monclova, February 28, 1762, in “testimonio,” superior government, 1763, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1933B. For a more detailed account, see Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 4: 187–190.

⁸⁰ Britten, *Lipan Apaches*, 116–124; Weddle, *San Sabá*, 156–158, 166; Chipman and López Elizondo, “New Light,” 178. Even Chinese porcelain found its way to the *presidio*, surely to enhance the dining comfort of Captain Rábago. Bennett R. Kimbell, “The Southeastern Baluarte at Presidio San Sabá, Menard, Texas: An Analysis of the Documentary and Archeological Evidence” (M.A. Thesis, Texas Tech University, 2008), 92–93, 136. Chinese goods reached Acapulco via the Manila Galleon. See Marina Alfonso Mola and Carlos Martínez Shaw, *La ruta española a China* (Madrid: El Viso Editions, 2007).

⁸¹ Testimony on the Comanche insults upon San Sabá, Mexico, 1763, Box 2Q148, vol. 92 (1748–1763), Part II, 209–343, Dunn Transcripts, DT, DBCAH.

His service undoubtedly earned some noteworthy merit in the eyes of the crown.

Rábago, of course, had no way to anticipate the strange conjuncture of events that would revolutionize the Texas frontier, render his command largely meaningless, and profoundly alter his destiny. The British, who viewed the Third Family Compact as a hostile act, declared war on January 4, 1762. Their stunning victory at Havana during the following summer shook Spain to its very foundations. The Armada suffered devastating losses in the battle, a disaster that would not be equaled until Spain's historic defeat at Trafalgar in 1805. To retrieve Havana, Madrid found itself forced to sacrifice Florida in the Treaty of Paris of February 10, 1763. For their part, the French lost Canada and their lands west of the Appalachians all the way to the Mississippi River. To reassure their Bourbon ally, to secure its accession to an early peace, and to sustain its cooperation in the anticipated ongoing struggle against the British, the French ceded Louisiana to Spain during the peace negotiations. Versailles had dangled that territory before Madrid during 1760 and 1761 when seeking to convince Spain to enter the war, or at least to lend it money, and now the territory meant very little to them.⁸²

These new realities meant that New Orleans became Madrid's barrier against its hated British rival in North America, and it accordingly assumed priority on New Spain's northern frontier.⁸³ The Texas *presidios* as strategic barriers against the French lost their meaning. With huge expenditures also required to rebuild and expand the fortifications and armed forces of Havana, and to safeguard Louisiana, and in view of the immense demands of the Armada, which enjoyed priority in the mind of King Charles, good sense demanded rationalization of the Texas defense line against hostile native peoples.⁸⁴ The colony had little value and, as explained by Weddle, the Indians, now armed with firearms, had become impossible to manage.⁸⁵ Even before the implementation of Rubí's plan to reset a shortened *presidio* line much farther south, the handwriting was on the wall.

Rábago moved in 1768, transferring his company to the site of the San Lorenzo mission. He resigned and returned to Spain, abandoning his huge investment and what must have once been ambitious dreams to gain fame on the Texas frontier. Charles recognized his merit by making him a knight in the Order of Santiago, an honor of great importance. Significantly, Rábago was able to exploit his wealth and credentials to establish an entailed estate (*mayorazgo*) near Cádiz, which reinforced his noble standing.⁸⁶ Obviously, there was much more

⁸² Aiton, "Diplomacy," 701–720. In some respects, the losses at Havana exceeded those of 1805. See Kuethe, "La política naval," 34.

⁸³ For the funds directed to Spanish Louisiana, see Kuethe, "Imperativas Militares: La Habana, San Juan y la Luisiana en la Época de Carlos III," in *Histórica y globalización: ensayos en homenaje a Alfredo Castillero Calvo* (Panama City, Panama: Editora Novo Art, 2017), 72.

⁸⁴ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 178–181, provides a succinct account of this adjustment. For the primacy of naval spending under Charles III, see Kuethe, "La política naval," 34–50.

⁸⁵ Weddle, *San Sabá*, 176–178.

⁸⁶ Chipman, *Spanish Texas*, 178–179; Chipman and López Elizondo, "New Light," 162, 179–180. For this process and Rábago's backers in Spain, see Serrano Álvarez, "Cabildo y presidios," 386.

to this man than the negative image that historians have assigned him thus far.

In the final analysis, the importance of Spain's penetration to the San Sabá should be fully appreciated both for Texas and the empire. The venture when analyzed from an imperial perspective was essentially secular in character, albeit cloaked in the piety of an earlier time, as Madrid and its agents in America sought to close militarily the huge, unsettled gap between San Antonio and Santa Fe, which lay exposed to possible French penetration. At court, disillusion with the Second Family Compact and consequent concerns over Spain's colonial frontiers with France, primarily in Texas and New Mexico, led the Marqués de la Ensenada to assume an aggressive posture. Through the work of Viceroy Revillagigedo and Amarillas, this policy eventually found expression in Presidio San Luis de las Amarillas, which continued to enjoy Madrid's support well after Ensenada had departed. The missionary endeavor, which historians have traditionally emphasized, provided moral cover, but it was a distant second in importance.

Significantly, the San Sabá advance persevered at considerable expense and hardship well after Indians destroyed the mission. It is highly revealing that the crown continued to invest impressive sums in the *presidio* even as British advances in North America gradually pushed the two Bourbon powers toward reconciliation. Presidio San Luis endured until Madrid's acquisition of Louisiana fundamentally altered strategic realities in Texas and rendered it obsolete. More specifically, when the military focus shifted to Louisiana's frontier with British North America, Caribbean, and Armada, economic realities demanded a rationalization of New Spain's northern defense line to a position much farther south, whence it could challenge hostile natives much more efficiently. Presidio San Luis, where the crown invested so much treasure, lay abandoned well within Comanche territory. Looking ahead, the secular, militarized practices that Ensenada, Revillagigedo, and Amarillas pursued on the Texas frontier anticipated what would be common practice throughout the empire during subsequent decades.⁸⁷

The perspective presented here strongly suggests that Captain Felipe Rábago, whose service in Texas has received uniformly unfavorable treatment, deserves reevaluation. Defamed by the highly suspect testimony of hostile friars but also subsequently losing his support at Court, Rábago, found himself unjustly separated from his command, and even imprisoned, for eight years, only to be suddenly restored to it on the San Sabá. His fate mirrored the changing politics at court, and that is what counted. On a personal level, the captain showed considerable growth during his time in Coahuila and on the San Sabá, as he evolved from the brash, self-indulgent youth seen at San Xavier into a man who would show considerable dedication in discharging an important royal assignment. But the friars' biased accounts of him and the events during the San

⁸⁷ Weber, *Bárbaros*, 102–109; Kuethe, *Military Reform and Society*, 130–144; Kuethe, “Pacification Campaign,” 467–481.

Xavier fiasco have deeply influenced the historical literature. Can such treatment be appropriate for a man who through his service became a subject worthy of two of Spain's highest honors?

One mystery remains: why would a man like Rábago want to command the garrisons of San Xavier and San Sabá? Even within New Spain, that remote, hostile land must have seemed like the end of the earth. Franquis, for example, when restored to the governorship snatched from him during his time in Texas, declined the honor, instead returning to Madrid to improve his lot. There, in 1746, the former governor presented a long exposé to Ensenada which, among other things, denounced Texas's Franciscan missionaries.⁸⁸ By contrast, Rábago remained and accepted the challenges. True, his prospects did not equal those of Franquis, but he nevertheless was wealthy and surely could have secured a position in a location more attractive than Texas.⁸⁹ One tentative explanation for his interest in San Sabá might have been the rumors of potential riches in mining, perhaps even silver.⁹⁰ Indeed, he was eager to move out of San Xavier from the start.⁹¹ Or he simply aspired to make his mark on the frontier. That possibility is suggested by the considerable sum that he eventually invested in the presidio. Yet, there may well have been more to the story. In many ways, Rábago remains a mystery.

⁸⁸ Kuethe, "Carlos Franquis," 558–559, 560–562. Ensenada later assigned Franquis a position under Admiral Andrés de Reggio, then operating out of Havana.

⁸⁹ Franquis, for example, purchased a colonelcy for 4,000 pesos in the regular army and the governorship of Tlaxcala (which eventually led him to Texas) for 3,000 pesos. Kuethe, "Carlos Franquis," 543. Rábago spent nearly twice that much to help sustain the San Sabá venture.

⁹⁰ For the rumors of mining opportunities, see Chipman and López Elizondo, "New Light," 171. As early as 1748, Pedro Rábago had written about the rich mineral deposits to be found just west of the Colorado River in the region where Presidio San Luis would eventually be established. Rábago to Antonio María Bucareli y Ursúa, Santa Rosa de Sacramento, AGI, Guadalajara, leg. 513.

⁹¹ Juan Rodríguez de Albuérne to Altamira, Mexico, Feb. 14, 1752, AGI, Mexico, leg. 1933A. See also Castañeda, *Catholic Heritage*, 3: 314–318.