

Introduction



During the colonial period, hundreds of thousands of Indians from frontier regions of Latin America joined Catholic missions. They left small, dispersed, and mobile communities to live in large, settled mission towns with Catholic priests. Many turned to missions as a way to protect themselves and their communities from pressures associated with Spanish imperialism. In contrast, the Spanish Crown envisioned missions as a tool for incorporating these peoples and their lands into its empire. Under such a mandate, the Crown contracted Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Mercedarians to bring together dispersed groups of indigenous peoples to live together in single mission towns, where missionaries taught them Catholicism and instructed them in settled agriculture and European cultural practices. By 1767, over 265,000 Native Americans resided in more than two hundred Jesuit missions throughout the Americas (see Map 1).¹

Of all the missions in the Americas, the Guaraní missions of the Río de la Plata region of South America are widely believed to have been the most successful in terms of the number of indigenous inhabitants, economic prosperity, and historical importance. The Jesuit historical dictionary claims the Guaraní missions to have been the order's most famous achievement in Spanish America.² From their founding in 1609, the Guaraní missions grew to over 140,000 inhabitants at their peak in 1732—an average of over 4,500 Indians per mission.³ The two Jesuits assigned to each mission could not force hundreds or thousands of Indians either to join or to stay. Rather, the Guaraní chose to join and remain in the missions in the face of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism.

By the eighteenth century, the majority of mission Guaraní had been residing in the missions for generations, and as a result, mission culture—biological, technological, organizational, and theological systems that incorporated aspects of both native and Jesuit-inspired customs and



Map 1. Jesuit missions in Spanish America, 1766

SOURCE: Weber, *Bárbaros*, 111. Reprinted by permission of Yale University Press.

practices—developed among the Guaraní.⁴ Growth through natural reproduction rather than immigration allowed the Jesuits to move beyond baptism and intensify their efforts at such wide-ranging cultural change.⁵ Other missions in Spanish America never reached this stage; mission populations elsewhere only grew with the addition of new converts.⁶ Given the extended period of population growth without new immigrants, mission culture developed more deeply and broadly among the Guaraní than among other mission populations.

The Guaraní missions were significant population centers for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Río de la Plata. In 1745, the number

of Guaraní residing in a single mission—Mission Yapcyú—equaled more than half the total population of Buenos Aires a year earlier.⁷ The missions also contained a large portion of the entire region's population. Between 1680 and 1682, the twenty-two Guaraní missions accounted for over half of the entire Río de la Plata population, and by 1759 the number of Guaraní residing in the thirteen missions of the province of Paraguay outnumbered all other inhabitants of the province combined.⁸ The large numbers of inhabitants meant that the mission labor force enabled high levels of economic activity.

The Guaraní missions played an important role in the economy of the Río de la Plata region. Extensive territory and a diversity of productive assets made the missions into a regional economic powerhouse. The missions' main trade good—*yerba maté* (Paraguayan tea that continues to be popular in the Southern Cone)—supplied the local and regional markets as far away as Potosí and Chile. The missions reinvested a significant portion of the proceeds from such sales to develop mission towns and build grand religious structures. Scholars of mission art and architecture attest to the missions' affluence, as evident in the façade of the Mission San Miguel church (see Figure 1).⁹

In the second half of the eighteenth century, political restructuring and competition undermined the missions' favorable position. The institution



Figure 1. Catholic church at Mission San Miguel

SOURCE: Julia Sarreal, 2005.

could not withstand reforms that gave a greater role to both the Crown and the market economy. Regional economic growth further undermined the institution. As a result of these changes, the missions became bankrupt. By 1800, Crown officials decided that the Guaraní missions were beyond repair and formally began to dismantle them.

This book argues that the Guaraní people built the structural foundations for the economic success of the thirty Jesuit missions between 1609 and 1768 and subsequently continued to shape their social development. As such, it provides a context for understanding indigenous agency in the borderlands of Spanish America. Although the Spanish Crown's reforms and intervention led to the missions' economic decline, the Guaraní missions continued to endure until the end of the colonial period. This book explores the economic foundations for the missions' success as well as ultimate deterioration and emphasizes Guaraní participation in these processes.

Given their importance, the Guaraní missions have attracted the attention of numerous scholars.¹⁰ While many important works have been written on the subject, my discussion will be limited to those most relevant to the topics at hand. In the past, scholars tended to describe missions on the basis of Spanish sources without addressing the authors' biases or underlying motivations. In recent years, mission scholarship has become more critical of sources and shifted its focus to the Indians' experience and Indian agency.¹¹ In addition to re-examining Jesuit sources, scholars use Guaraní letters as a means of drawing out Guaraní voices.¹² This book extends such methodology by highlighting the Guaraní perspective and the economic actions of Guaraní communities as recorded in quantitative sources such as accounting books and censuses.

Much of the recent scholarship on the Guaraní and their missions has been cultural history.¹³ These works primarily explore Guaraní identity—how the Guaraní viewed themselves and the world around them. This book takes a different approach to ethnohistory (the interdisciplinary study of indigenous, diasporic, and minority peoples). While I use documents written by the Guaraní to shed light on their experiences with and perception of the mission economy, my goal is not to describe their entire mission experience. Instead, this study is the first to focus on the missions' socio-economic structure. Such analysis leads to a fuller understanding of how the Guaraní experienced the missions. The Guaraní spent much of their time working in the mission economy as laborers and received regular distributions from the mission's communal supplies; thus the mission economy directly affected their standard of living. Equally important, the mission economy provided the funding that made the mission enterprise possible.

Scholars have explored how the Guaraní fit into the political and social structures that organized the mission population.¹⁴ A complex administrative structure emerged to organize and manage the large mission population. This book contributes to such discussion by characterizing native leadership in the missions as either charismatic, coercive, or organizational. Charismatic leaders possessed traits that fit with Guaraní concepts of leadership; coercive leaders exercised authority based on the threat of punishment; organizational leaders divided the mission population into smaller units. Such analysis demonstrates that while native elites without charismatic leadership qualities had difficulty exercising power, the governing structure's flexibility allowed non-elites with such traits to access leadership positions. In contrast to earlier studies, this book also underscores how during the post-Jesuit period Guaraní *cabildos* (town councils) gained substantial new powers and became increasingly important as compared to Spanish officials and other Guaraní leaders.¹⁵

The mission economy, which funded operations and sustained the population, also shaped mission history. Scholars, however, have not focused ample attention on this important aspect of Guaraní history.¹⁶ This book is the first economic history of the Guaraní missions from their peak through their decline. It employs mission account books, letters, and other archival materials to trace the Guaraní mission work regime and to examine how the Guaraní shaped the mission economy. It also describes the missions' larger importance in the Río de la Plata region by highlighting the interplay among the missions, their Guaraní inhabitants, and the regional economy.

Tracking changes in the mission population is one of the best measures of the missions' vitality. Most demographic studies calculate the size of the mission population over time and divide the inhabitants into categories based on gender, age, and marital status.¹⁷ Such studies provide some anecdotal information about mortality rates and flight. In contrast, this study quantifies population numbers over time and explores the relative importance of mortality versus flight during the post-Jesuit years.

While the missions underwent definitive decline after the Jesuit expulsion in 1768, events in the 1750s foreshadowed such problems. In 1750, the Treaty of Madrid awarded the seven easternmost missions to the Portuguese in return for Colonia del Sacramento. In response to the treaty, mission Guaraní fought Portuguese and Spanish troops in defense of their land in the Guaraní War. Although the terms of the treaty were officially rescinded in 1761, the missions never fully recovered. While earlier scholarship focuses on the Treaty of Madrid and how the war affected the Jesuits, more recent scholarship focuses on the actions taken by the Guaraní.¹⁸ This work adds to the existing literature by showing how

contemporary descriptions of Jesuit activity among the Guaraní were among the most effective means employed both to promote and defend the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portuguese (1759), French (1762), and Spanish territory (1767).

Between 1768 and 1800, the mission population fell by almost half, and the economy became insolvent. Scholarship on the Guaraní missions generally overlooks this important period.¹⁹ Conventional accounts attribute the missions' decline to the expulsion of the Jesuits, first from territory ceded to Portugal in 1750 (as depicted in the film *The Mission*) and then from all of Spanish America in 1767. Mission historiography highlights the role of corruption and poor administration while also addressing other contributing factors.²⁰ Much of this analysis relies on reports by mission administrators and fails to provide a coherent and comprehensive explanation for the missions' decline. In contrast, this book provides an integrated explanation of the various causal factors that led to that decline. In addition, it highlights how the Guaraní contributed to and experienced this process.

The missions' prosperity and importance in the region led contemporaries to form strong opinions either in support of or in opposition to the institution; such conflicting views continue to be apparent today. On one hand, proponents of the missions highlight that the Jesuits protected the Indians from exploitation and preserved the Guaraní language and other aspects of indigenous culture.²¹ On the other hand, opponents emphasize that the Jesuits took away the Indians' freedom, forced them to radically change their lifestyle, physically abused them, and subjected them to disease.²²

My intent is not to pass moral judgment on the missions. It is a given that contact with Europeans decimated indigenous populations and irrevocably changed the Guaraní way of life.²³ The missions were a function of their time and clearly had both negative and positive repercussions for the Guaraní. My goal is rather to provide a better understanding of the mission experience from the Guaraní perspective. Why did the Guaraní join the missions? Why did many opt to stay after the Jesuits left? How did the Guaraní influence daily life in the missions and how did they contribute to the missions' decline? This study takes a new approach by combining economic and social analysis to understand the Indians' daily life and living standards in the missions. The result is a richer and more complex understanding of the changes that mission Indians experienced during the colonial period.

The Guaraní were exposed and reacted to Spanish imperialism in two distinct stages. First, from 1609 to 1768 the Jesuits introduced the Guaraní to certain aspects of Spanish culture and practices. The Guaraní

adopted some of these changes, resisted others, and made their own mark on the missions. Mission culture reflected such negotiation between the Guaraní and the Jesuits. During this period the Jesuits exposed the Guaraní to settled agriculture and the Catholic religion in addition to European cultural norms while simultaneously trying to limit Guaraní exposure to behaviors that contradicted Catholic teachings. The missionaries tried to restrict outside influences on the Guaraní by limiting the Indians' absences from the missions and contact with outsiders. Despite such efforts, activities such as hunting cattle, gathering yerba maté, transporting goods, and participating in military engagements took the Indians outside of the mission. The Guaraní also left the mission without Jesuit approval. Still, mission Guaraní were more isolated than other mission Indians. Sonoran, Nueva Vizcayan, and Californian Indians regularly left the missions in order to labor in presidios and mines.²⁴ Such competition over labor and other productive resources at least partly explains why these missions never achieved demographic and financial success equivalent to that of the Guaraní missions.

A communal structure of collective labor, shared ownership, and redistribution of mission property formed the basis of the mission economy. Mission Guaraní generally did not engage in paid labor, commerce, or the ownership of private property. Instead, they worked both collectively and independently, and they relied primarily on provisions supplied from communal supplies. While private property existed, communal property played a much more significant role in the missions. Such communal culture did not make the missions proto-socialist societies as some have argued.²⁵ Although not dramatic, inequalities existed among Indians in terms of power, status, and the receipt of material goods.

During the Jesuit period, the missions prospered as a result of this communal culture, but they were not efficient. The missions' prosperity depended on subsidies from the Jesuit order, special protection and privileges from the Crown, and the lack of competition. These factors enabled the missions to use their productive resources inefficiently yet still flourish financially. The inefficiency of the Jesuit missions contrasts with earlier studies that highlight the productivity of rural enterprises operated by the Jesuits in Spanish America.²⁶

In the second half of the eighteenth century, Bourbon reforms exposed the missions' inefficiency. The missions lost both their subsidy from the Jesuit order and their special protection and privileges from the Crown. Furthermore, regional economic growth led to competition over the missions' productive resources. As a result of these changes, the missions found that they could no longer either defend their property rights or inefficiently use productive resources.

With the Jesuit expulsion, the Guaraní were suddenly thrown into the second stage of exposure to Spanish imperialism. Crown officials replaced Jesuit missionaries with priests from other religious orders to oversee the missions' religious affairs and government-appointed officials to oversee all nonreligious affairs. In addition, mission reforms promoted private property and commerce. In response, acculturation and assimilation intensified as individual Guaraní increasingly engaged in the market economy.

In contrast to earlier scholars, I downplay the importance of corruption in explaining the missions' decline. Royal officials instituted a system of checks and balances that limited, though failed to eliminate, corruption. To maintain accountability at the highest level of mission management, the general administrator in charge of the mission economy provided a substantial deposit before assuming his position. Additionally, oversight by the Guaraní, higher-level officials in the mission bureaucracy, and priests increased accountability and prevented Spanish administrators from acting autocratically at the individual mission level.

The Guaraní *cabildo* in the post-Jesuit era played a much larger formal role in mission management than before. During the Jesuit period, Guaraní scribes and secretaries recorded information related to mission management, but there is no indication that they gave their signed consent or approval to trade documents, audited account records, or had high-level decision-making power.²⁷ In contrast, post-Jesuit reforms mandated that the administrator consult with the *cabildo* when making decisions and that the *cabildo* approve—with their signatures—all transactions related to mission property. At least as early as 1770, Guaraní leaders started signing receipts for their mission's trade and summaries of their mission's accounting records; hundreds of mission receipts, inventories, and summaries of inflows and outflows of goods contain such signatures.²⁸ These written records created an intricate paper trail for documenting and tracing all transactions. Accounting records included signed receipts at all stages of a transaction, while various debit-and-credit books summarized transactions. *Cabildo* members almost always signed these documents, and every two to three years the principal accounts office (*Tribunal Mayor de Cuentas*) for the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata audited these account records.

Even though *cabildo* members regularly signed their mission's accounting documents, Guaraní leaders generally lacked the knowledge and training to take full advantage of formal inclusion in their mission's management decisions. The Jesuits had not prepared the Guaraní for such oversight responsibilities. For over 150 years, the missionaries had made all of the high-level decisions, signed all contracts, managed trade,

and arranged business outside of the missions on behalf of the Guaraní. Although post-Jesuit reformers nobly empowered the Guaraní to oversee and manage their mission's resources, on-the-job training generally did not provide the requisite skills. Cabildo members' signatures did not mean that the signatories understood the numerous receipts with an immense amount of detail and the complex accounting books with many pages of information.

At least some cabildo members could not read the documents that they were charged with signing, owing to inadequate literacy skills. Signature patterns suggest that some Guaraní leaders were illiterate or semiliterate. Generally only a few cabildo members signed a document, and frequently one member explicitly signed on behalf of those who could not sign their own name. Furthermore, many Guaraní leaders who signed their names often did so with a rough hand. Those who struggled with signing their name likely also had difficulty in reading the documents.

The use of the Spanish language was a further obstacle for some Guaraní leaders. All of the accounting documents—except for some occasional information written by Guaraní leaders—were in Spanish. While a literate but non-Spanish-speaking Indian could probably decipher written numbers and names of people and items, descriptive text written in Spanish would be more difficult to understand. Even though post-Jesuit reformers promoted educating mission Guaraní in Spanish, the Guaraní language still prevailed. Throughout the post-Jesuit period Guaraní leaders almost always continued to conduct their written correspondence with mission or viceregal officials in Guaraní. This preference suggests that at least some Guaraní leaders felt uncomfortable with or had difficulty writing in Spanish.

While the signatures do not prove that the Guaraní leaders actually participated in or understood the transactions described in the documents, the process itself provided them with the opportunity to influence mission management. Signatures by cabildo members are found in hundreds of mission accounting documents from the post-Jesuit period. Signing the documents required exposure to descriptions of their mission's economic transactions and financial condition. If cabildo members did not agree with this information or wanted to make life difficult for the Spanish administrator, they could withhold their signatures. Given that receipts and account books almost always contained various signatures by cabildo members, a lack thereof would be a red flag for the higher-level bureaucrats who inspected these accounting documents. Thus, even if the Guaraní did not understand everything that they signed, their signature of consent was still a powerful tool for both empowering the Guaraní cabildo and keeping the administrator in check.

Both mission and regional reforms spurred economic growth in the Río de la Plata region and thereby also led to the missions' decline. Crown officials thought such reforms would bring prosperity to the missions and the Guaraní. The reforms succeeded in increasing private property, commerce, and wage labor among the Guaraní, but not in the way that Spanish reformers expected. Guaraní engagement in the market economy undermined the communal foundation that defined the missions.

The mission economy never underwent a resurgence during the post-Jesuit period.²⁹ While gross revenue (total revenue before expenses) was significantly higher during the first two decades after the Jesuit expulsion, this does not mean that the thirty missions enjoyed a period of economic recovery.³⁰ Rather, the boom in revenues resulted from one mission's (Mission Yapeyú) sale of cattle hides. Not including Yapeyú (an anomaly among the missions and discussed in its own chapter), average yearly sales revenue for the remaining twenty-nine missions during these post-Jesuit years did not exceed the average for the Jesuit period.

While the Guaraní were pressured to produce trade goods for the market economy, the Guaraní found ways to mediate labor demands. Higher quantities of yerba maté sold during the first decades after the Jesuit expulsion erroneously imply increased exploitation of Guaraní workers.³¹ In fact, almost all of this yerba maté was of inferior quality as compared to the Jesuit period and thus required significantly less labor to produce. Its lower quality was reflected in a much lower price, and although the quantity of yerba maté substantially increased during the post-Jesuit period, gross revenues did not. Furthermore, the missions disinvested—as they did with most of their productive assets.³² By no longer maintaining and replanting many of the missions' domesticated yerba maté trees, the Guaraní reduced their labor demands. In effect, such purposeful depletion of assets prolonged the missions' decline.

Post-Jesuit reforms thus made the missions unsustainable. The market-based ideology of private property and commerce clashed with the communal culture of collective labor, shared ownership, and redistribution of mission property. Furthermore, the separation of the religious and secular aspects of mission management, combined with regional economic growth, undermined the missions' financial viability. The missions were no longer receiving subsidies from the Jesuit order at the same time that expenses ballooned as a result of the market wages paid to new secular officials. The expanding regional economy led to competition over resources such as Guaraní labor, land, cattle, and yerba maté trees. By 1801 the mission population had fallen by two-thirds from its peak in 1732 and the missions were struggling to maintain their very existence. This decline was caused by official efforts to develop the Río de la Plata region

and modernize the missions and their Indian inhabitants by pushing them into the taxable world economy.

The market-based reforms created both winners and losers among the Guaraní. Many took advantage of opportunities offered by the rapidly growing regional economy. Skilled Guaraní had the most to gain and easily found employment elsewhere. Working-age males, and to a lesser degree females, also left the missions at a high rate. Still, a considerable number of Guaraní remained in the missions. These Guaraní received fewer goods overall from communal supplies than before and now had to find alternate ways to procure necessities. Many began to buy and sell goods on their own behalf—something that did not occur under the Jesuits. Inequality also increased. While Guaraní leaders clearly did not become as wealthy as native leaders elsewhere in Spanish America, some benefited from mission reforms that encouraged distinctions and privileges based on status. Cabildo members, especially the *corregidor* (head of the cabildo), were best positioned to take advantage of these changes. They had significantly more control and access to mission resources than during the Jesuit period. Some individuals used their connections to engage in market exchanges for their own benefit and/or diverted mission resources for their own use. The biggest losers were widows, orphans, and others who had difficulty supporting themselves; the missions no longer set aside material resources as a safety net to help such individuals. This change points to the breakdown of the missions' social fabric; those in need could no longer rely on distributions of food, clothing, or other items for subsistence.

There were also winners and losers among the missions; those with access to goods in high demand from the booming regional economy had the most to gain. A few missions (primarily Yapeyú and San Miguel) had rights to massive quantities of cattle, which gave them a tremendous advantage, given the high demand for cattle hides (the primary regional export during this period). The benefit to these missions, however, was short-lived. High production costs consumed much of the revenues, and the missions could not continue to use productive resources inefficiently or defend their property rights.

Although some aspects are unique to this particular institution, studying the Guaraní missions also offers new insights into the broader relationship between European colonists and native peoples. The history of colonial Latin America is the extension of Spanish and Portuguese rule—or failure thereof—over indigenous peoples and their territory. In the past, this has been a story of how Spaniards and Portuguese (conquistadors, missionaries, and settlers) forced their rule upon Indians.³³ As attention has shifted from the colonial state to Indians and their communities,

many scholars have highlighted Indian resistance to European imperialism and the devastation of native societies.³⁴

This study of the Guaraní adds to such work by highlighting Indians' ability to consciously manipulate the institutions of European imperialism. Indigenous peoples adopted aspects of Iberian culture and worked within the new political system in an effort to maintain and revitalize their own communities.³⁵ Both individually and collectively, Indians used the colonial structure—especially the legal system—to protect and advance their interests.³⁶ Some Indians found roles as intermediaries, purposefully building alliances with Europeans for their own benefit or that of their community.³⁷ Even in places where both the state and the Catholic Church made few inroads, scholars have found that indigenous intermediaries still participated in and manipulated Iberian imperialism. As in other places in Spanish America, indigenous communities maintained a degree of autonomy by engaging with colonial authorities.³⁸

This book does not aspire to provide a comprehensive history of the Guaraní missions but rather traces the process by which the Guaraní responded to political changes during the late colonial period, and how they became increasingly integrated into the Spanish Empire and the broader Atlantic world. Detailing the entire lifespan of the missions is likewise beyond the scope of this book: the development of the missions during the seventeenth century falls outside of the goals of this project, and ample literature about this period already exists.³⁹ Moreover, accounting records—foundational to this study—have not been located for the seventeenth century. This study is also limited in that it focuses only on the missions founded by the Jesuits and not on the Franciscan missions as well.⁴⁰ Finally, Missions San Joaquín and San Estanislao are not included because they were founded later and followed a different trajectory from the thirty Guaraní missions.⁴¹ Specifically, then, this study focuses on the thirty missions that bordered the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers and their eighteenth-century peak and decline.

A brief clarification of terminology is necessary before proceeding. I rely heavily on terms used in source documents. Unless otherwise noted, the terms “Guaraní” and “Indian” refer to the inhabitants or former inhabitants of the Guaraní missions. “Guaraní” is an oversimplification given that various ethnic groups inhabited the missions, and the term “Indian” is clearly problematic. Source documents refer to mission inhabitants as Guaraní, *Indios*, or *naturales*. I have chosen to use the first two terms, since *naturales* (natives) translates poorly into English. Likewise, I follow the primary sources by using “Spaniard” and “Portuguese” for all Hispanicized peoples regardless of their place of birth or racial composition. Such classifications are necessary, but the reader should keep

in mind that these artificially constructed categories obscure social and cultural complexities. Within the text, I use the term “pueblo” when referring to a mission’s urban center—the housing, church, storerooms, and workshops—as opposed to all of a mission’s territory. I use “governor” in reference to the Spanish governor of Río de la Plata, Buenos Aires, or Paraguay and “gobernador” for the Spanish governor of the thirty missions. Before the creation of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata in 1776, the most important Crown official in the region was the governor. After the creation of the viceroyalty, governors continued to exist but were subordinate to the viceroy. Likewise, the most important Spanish official overseeing the thirty missions was also called governor. The use of either “governor” or “gobernador” should limit any confusion between the two. Other Spanish or Guaraní terms are explained within the text or glossary.

The book is grounded in archival research: its descriptions and conclusions are based on a variety of primary sources. The discussion of the Jesuit period relies heavily on the writings of Jesuit missionaries, censuses of the mission population, and accounting records from the mission trading centers in Buenos Aires and Santa Fe.⁴² Many Jesuits wrote detailed accounts of mission life. Although the biases of the authors must be taken into account, these writings provide a great deal of information about the missions.

Discussion of the post-Jesuit period is based on both quantitative and qualitative sources. Mission reformers instituted a complex record-keeping and oversight apparatus. Tens of thousands of pages of receipts, accounting records, summary reports, and audits are found in Buenos Aires at the Archivo General de la Nación (AGN). This study uses the centralized mission accounting records of the Buenos Aires general administration to track the overall health of the mission system and the mission-level account records to track Guaraní living standards and the performance of individual missions.

Even though they contain a tremendous amount of information, accounting records cannot be taken at face value. Record keepers sometimes wrote down the wrong numbers, forgot to record something, incorrectly added or subtracted, or omitted or distorted information. Various levels of checks and balances limited but did not correct all mistakes or prevent all abuses. The various signatories of receipts and/or account books likely did not always understand what they were signing. Furthermore, at least some merchants, Spanish officials, and Guaraní leaders were either willingly involved in corrupt activities or were threatened or bribed into compliance. Such shortcomings do not mean that the data are meaningless. By observing trends in the data rather than relying on individual

cases, we can avoid various pitfalls. I use qualitative documents to give context to the accounting records. Given the deteriorating conditions in the missions, both Guaraní and Spaniards wrote letters and reports describing their experiences and suggesting reforms. As with Jesuit writings, the authors' biases must be taken into account. Most of the authors were interested parties who had something to gain. With all of the primary sources, I pay particular attention to drawing out Guaraní voices. While most authors were Spanish, mission Guaraní also left a paper trail. In addition to their letters and signatures, individual Guaraní also appeared in account records when they purchased something from or sold something to the mission. As best as the sources allow, such Guaraní experience both frames and shapes my analysis.

The book is organized both chronologically and thematically. The chronological organization results in a deeper understanding of how native peoples experienced as well as shaped mission life in its various stages. The thematic approach provides a comprehensive explanation for the missions' decline. The first section contains four chapters explaining the life cycle of the missions under the Jesuits. The second section contains five chapters exploring the reasons for the Guaraní missions' decline. Chapter 1 examines Guaraní and Jesuit motivations behind the missions and provides background about the founding of the institution and its early years in the Río de la Plata region. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the peak period of the missions during the first half of the eighteenth century. Chapter 2 explains the urban design of the mission pueblos, the Guaraní populations living in these towns, and the governing structure. Chapter 3 describes the economy that funded the missions and Guaraní participation in it. Chapter 4 explores how events related to the Guaraní missions contributed to the Jesuit expulsion from Portuguese, French, and Spanish territory in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Chapters 5 through 8—the central part of the book—explain why the missions declined. Chapter 5 looks at how mission reforms bankrupted the coordinated enterprise of the thirty missions. Chapter 6 both explores why the Guaraní opted either to remain in or to abandon their mission and analyzes the impact of the declining number of mission inhabitants. Chapter 7 examines the living standards of the Guaraní who opted to stay in the missions and how they met their basic needs. Chapter 8 looks at how the expanding regional economy offered a unique financial opportunity for Missions Yapeyú and San Miguel and why these two missions and their inhabitants failed to prosper. The final chapter explains how the communal structure of collective labor, shared ownership, and distribution of mission supplies endured for over three decades after the Jesuit expulsion and the factors that led to its ultimate collapse.

In addition to providing a comprehensive explanation of the ways in which Crown reforms made the missions unsustainable, this book is the first to explain how actions taken by mission administrators and the Guaraní prolonged the missions' history for over three decades. The study's most significant contribution relates to the missions' decline and the integration of the Guaraní into the market economy. Such an understanding, however, requires an explanation of the sociopolitical structures that underlay the missions' success. The book, overall, provides this long-term analysis, focusing at all times on the Guaraní and their unique contributions to the construction, maintenance, and ultimate end of the missions as a colonial institution.