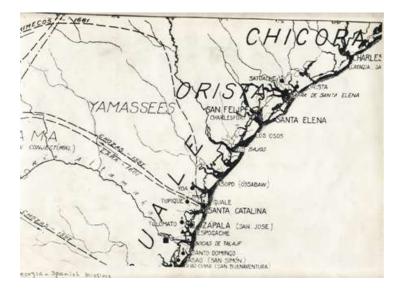
Spanish Missions: Early Encounters between the Christian and the "Noble Savage"

As the sixteenth century gave way to the seventeenth, the Spanish economy began to weaken, and so the monarchy put an end to the expensive, unproductive conquests of explorers like de Soto. Outposts on the Atlantic Coast were established in order to protect Spanish shipping and claims on Florida from first French, then English, pirates and settlement expansion.

In Georgia, Spanish Franciscan monks established missions in a region they called Guale after the dominant native people in the area. Their goals centered on establishing control over the coastal Indians by converting them to Christianity, teaching them the Spanish language, and developing what amounted to a feudal system under which the Indians served as peasants.

Map of Spanish Missions in Georgia



For the most part, the Franciscan monks achieved their goals, but at large costs to the culture of the Native Americans. Games, marriage practices, ways of worship, and styles of dress were changed or eradicated to conform to Christian principles, and those who rebelled against change were whipped or suppressed and often killed by soldiers.

European diseases continued to plague the Indians and this kept many tribes weak. Several chiefs hoped that accepting the Franciscan ways would keep their people safe from disease, continue the flow of technologically advanced items into their community, and keep them more powerful than neighboring chiefdoms.

Taking advantage of the competitiveness between chiefdoms and the provision of more technologically advanced weaponry and everyday items as a control measure became policy among the European nations vying for a hold on North America. The Indians soon found themselves caught up in an encounter that included some of the most powerful nations then on Earth.

Because of their resilience, Indians became indispensible to the European contenders for North American empire. On their contested frontiers, each empire desperately needed Indians as trading partners, guides, religious converts, and military allies. By the late seventeenth century, the imperial contests were primarily struggles to construct networks of Indian allies and to unravel those of rival powers. Indian relations were central to the development of every colonial region.