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**California Missions**

**Introduction**

California missions were initiated at the end of the 18th century. They were started as a struggle to convert the Native American to Catholicism and the expansion of the European terrain. The total amount of missions were 21 and they lasted from 1769 to 1833. Spain was accountable for all the missions. Scholars are under the belief that the missions were efforts to colonize the Pacific coast of North America. With the help of the mission system numerous new religious and cultural ideas were brought to California. Although critics give responsibility to the methodical domination of Native Americans amounted to oppression and slavery (Panich, 238-258). In the paper, the overview of the California Missions will be given, and the Mission San Diego de Alcala will be discussed.

**Discussion**

It was claimed by Spain in 1542 that California came under their territory, however, Spaniards did not make an attempt to take over the land till the end of the 1700s. Spain had a substantial existence in Mexico. An order was made by the Spanish King for sea and land excursions to proceed from Mexico to California (Panich, 238-258). The King also sent for Franciscan missionaries and military troops to the new territory. In 1769, the first mission was founded by the Franciscan priest Father Junipero Serra. This mission was given the name Mission San Diego de Alcala and today it is situated in San Diego.  
 When discussing the main goal and objective of the missions, it was to spread Christianity in the Native Americans. It was a vision to convert the Native Americans into Spanish citizens into devoted Christians (Panich, 238-258). With the help of the mission work, Spain tried to impact the natives with religious and cultural beliefs. Further, Spain wanted to make sure of the fact that the rival countries like Great Britain and Russia do not try and take over the Californian territory before them.

With the help of the mission, new communities were built in which the Native Americans were given instructions and religious education. The development of towns and forts was done by the Spanish as well to give their vision more structure and foundation. The procedure went in a manner that the natives would live in the Mission amid their religious training. Once their education and teachings were finished they were to leave and move to a house outside the missions. Once the natives completely convert to Christianity the jobs of the missionaries would be done (Sanders, and Sexton, 86-114). They would then move to new localities, and the mission that would be left behind would serve as a Community Church.

The name given to the native converts was "Neophytes." Once the newly converted natives were baptized they were expected to work and perform labor. Generally, the women would work in the kitchen and cook, while the men performed labor in the fields. Both the genders would learn to speak in Spanish and attend church on a regular basis. In the mission, communities farming was given great importance and considered essential. The people of the missions would grow maize, barley, and wheat as staples (Sanders, and Sexton, 86-114). Fruits like peaches, apples, and pears were also brought by the Spanish missionaries. Further, there were more jobs as well which were inclusive of building, carpentry, leather-work, and weaving. The missions were mainly overseen by the religious leaders most commonly known as Padres. A total of six soldiers were assigned to the religious leader for his protection as well as the mission territory.

Additionally, the era of the missions also invoked great architecture in California. The churches, houses, and buildings that were built back in time still exist to the present day. The mission structures were mostly made with natural materials. The natives gave great assistance when it comes to forming the architecture of the missions. They would use materials like tiles, mud bricks, stone, timber, and adobe to form the mission structures. Mostly, all the mission would have vast courtyards and protected with huge adobe walls (Sanders, and Sexton, 86-114). Mostly, the missions were constructed around patios which were already inclusive of a garden and a fountain. The architecture that was built in that era is given the label of "mission style." The label was given to give a description of the workmanship and the signature design.

However, when Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, there was a debate for several years on what to do with the mission system. Later in 1833, there was a bill passed by the Mexican Government which put an end to the missions. California had become a part of Mexico amid that period of time. Most of the property on which the missions were made was given back to the natives, however, some land was given back to the Mexican Government. Nonetheless, the majority of the land was given to the private owners (Doti). Later, during the war with Mexico in 1846, the mission buildings were made use of as the United States military bases. In 1848, when the discovery of gold was made at the Sutter’s Mill, there were substantial amounts of Americans who began to move to California. California was officially made a State two years later in 1848. The Catholic Churches were granted the ownership of some of the mission later in 1865 by Abraham Lincoln. Present day, these missions have turned into tourist attractions and have a museum of their own.

The California missions had a great influence on the Native Californians. Further, the era of the mission had a great influence on the religion, architecture, culture, language, economy, and art in the district (Doti). However, the mission was also responsible for impacting the Californian Indian culture negatively. The natives were forced by the Europeans to change their beliefs, so they can match with the modern ones. This fact resulted in the loss of a lot of authentic cultures, customs, and traditions. There was also a claim that the Spanish mission system enforced the natives into prostitution and slavery. Further, the lives of many natives were lost because of the diseases that were brought by the Spanish missionaries (Rice et al.). According to an estimate the Native Californians reduced from 300000 to 20000 by 1834 because of the California missions.

**Mission San Diego de Alcala**

The Mission San Diego de Alcala was the first mission which I currently situated in San Diego California. Junipero Serra founded the mission on 16th of July 1769. The mission and the areas that were surrounding it were given a name after the Catholic Didacus of Alcala. This mission is said to be the first place in California that saw a Christian burial. Generally, San Diego is also given the regard as the site of the region which saw the first execution. California's first-ever Catholic martyr Father Luis Jayme rests entombed underneath the chancel floor. The church which is currently present in that locality is the fifth church to be built on the locality (Rice et al.). The site on which the mission is situated has become a National Historic Landmark.

Initially, the natives that lived in the region in which the mission was built were resistant to the mission and the teachings that it had to offer. The local Tipai-lpai Indians ended up burning and attacking the San Diego mission. They killed three people in the process inclusive of Father Luis Diego (Mendoza and Levick). As mentioned above he is called the first ever martyr of the premises. After the attack, the mission was rebuilt by the missionaries but this time as an army fort.

However, the mission was able to take in many natives and teach them the Catholic teachings. The spreading of Christianity in the natives was the priority goal of the mission but the second main objection was to become self-sufficient. It is safe to say that farming was deemed the most substantial industry of not just the San Diego mission, but all missions. it was discovered that before the missions were established the natives knew a lot in regards to how to utilize bones, sea shells, wood, stone and so on to make weapons. The missionaries further refined their skills and helped them become self-supportive. They started to teach them many things which led to the establishment of a training school, which taught mechanical arts, agriculture, and the caring and raising of cattle (Mendoza and Levick). This led to the natives becoming very productive, all the things that they consumed and produced were done in the missions under the watchful eye of the Padres. Hence, the neophytes not only learned the art of self-support but also continued the complete civil government and military of California. The San Diego cultivated major crops that were inclusive of barley, wheat, corn, and grapes. They also cared for animals in the process as well. Later, in 1795 the labors of the first ever irrigation system of California began. The manager of the project was Fray Pedro Panto, he was murdered by his Indian cook before his Indian cook prior to the accomplishment of the irrigation project. The cook claimed that the Padre gave him many beatings which led to killing Panto.

California saw its first Vineyard in the mission as well, which was initially planted by Father Junipero Serra. It is unfortunate that the initial planting made by Father Serra did not survive, however, by the year 1781 vine was officially getting produced in the mission. In accordance with the source, the mission vineyard stretched up to around 50 acres. Now, coming to the mission bells. Bells carried great importance to all the missions and contributed on a daily basis (Madley, 14-47). They were said to be a means of signaling the people who were living in the mission. Bells were rung on various occasions like; telling the residents of the mission that it was meal time, if there was a religious service, to give a signal if a boat was approaching or if a missionary was returning back, and if there were any funerals or birth of a child. So, the bells were rung to communicate with the residents of the mission. Further, there were also a few rituals which were associated with the ringing of the bells (Madley, 14-47). The mission mainly had five bells and the very first bell was placed on a tree.

**Conclusion**

The mission system might have stopped and may have seen a fair share of controversy as well, but they are a part of important history. To this day these missions still exist and serve as tourist attractions (Madley, 14-47). Further, even the mission architecture has great significance in history and helps learn a thing or two about the authentic mission system. It is also safe to say that the Native Americans have had a significant role in contributing and even building the California mission system.

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