Abstract: The evangelization of the Indian peoples living in the Amazon valley during the 17th century was mainly executed by Jesuit missionaries. In order to achieve their goal, the fathers created a far-reaching network of interlinked mission settlements where the neophytes were submitted to a routine of catechesis and labour. This paper aims to show how, in spite of a rather harsh social and cultural control imposed by the Ignatians, traditional Amerindian knowledge concerning land use techniques (like slash-and-burn in communitarian regime, being the manioc a key-product) and seasonal collection of tropical rain forest products (especially, cacao and other kinds of spices and vegetal oils, some of which with real or imaginary therapeutic effects) characterized the economic activities of these villages. Until recently, historiography tended nearly exclusively to stress, according to the scholarly established logic of mercantilism, the importance of extractivism and export of the drogas do sertão (forest spices), to the detriment of many local agricultural initiatives. In fact, Jesuit documents show how production methods of European and autochthon origin were combined to ensure the survival of their mission plans. By doing so, the várzea (the fertile flood plain area) as well as the sertão (the vast hinterland covered with dense tropical forest) turned out to be the “territorial basis” for the complex system of colonial social relations that was going to emerge in the Amazon region.