Abstract: The evangelization of the Indian peoples 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 interconnected mission settlements where their neophytes were submitted to a routine of catechesis and labour. This paper aims to show how, in spite of the social and cultural control imposed by the Ignatians, traditional Amerindian knowledge concerning food production (being the manioc a key-product) and seasonal gathering of tropical rain forest products (especially, cacao and other kinds of spices and vegetal oils) marked 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 the multiple protagonism of the Indian population. Jesuit documents show how European and autochthon elements intermingled and ensured the survival of the mission network. Occupying strategic points in the várzea (the fertile flood plain area) as well as the sertão (the vast hinterland covered with dense tropical forest) these rural settlements turned out to be the “territorial basis” for the complex system of social and cultural relations that was emerging in the Amazon region.
1. Introduction

Many historians considered the ancient Jesuit missions spread out through the Amazon valley during the 17th and the first half of the 18th century as being the “cradles” of modern cities in the northern part of Brazil (Lopes, 2012; Guzmán, 2008; Araújo, 2003; Dias, 1982). In fact, the large network of reductions interlinked the most important strategic points in the vast floodplain, not menaced by the annual flood of the Amazon River, and had good climatic and ecological conditions to guarantee agricultural and extractivist activities. In spite of this inherent potentiality for later urban development, the missions, as they were conceived by the religious, had above all a rural character which they maintained until their official transformation into vilas, small semi-urban communities under direct colonial administration, in the second half of the 18th century.

This paper gives a general view of the multiple agricultural and extractivist activities in the missions or aldeamentos, with special regard to the socioeconomic contexts and cultural backgrounds in which they were embedded. The basis for the analysis are the writings of Jesuit missionaries, especially the chronicle and the letters of Father João Felipe Bettendorff. This cleric, born in the Duchy of Luxembourg in 1625, spent nearly four decades in the Amazon region. From 1661 until his death, in 1698, he held important positions, such as rector of the main colleges and superior of the Mission (Arenz, 2010, 178-355).

The main purpose of the reductions was, without any doubt, the catechesis of the Indians and their submission to a Catholic sovereign (Beezzo, 1983, 10-11). In order to achieve their goal, the missionaries used to build the missions in a certain distance to the agglomerations of the white settlers, but always alongside the strategic natural axis formed by the maritime coastline and the numerous rivers of the region (Mauro, 1972, 165). According to their specific tasks, there were basically four types of missions: a) the farms or fazendas attached to one of the two urban colleges (generally situated close to the towns); b) the villages intended exclusively for royal service (such as the saltworks on the Atlantic coast); c) the so called aldeamentos de repartição, whose male labour force was annually inventoried and distributed among the settlers, colonial authorities and the missionaries; d) the aldeamentos de doutrina dedicated to religious instruction, especially of groups recently contacted (Leite, 1943b, 99-103; Meier and Aymoré, 2005, 106).

The farms played a central role in the maintenance of the urban colleges and the production of supplies for the missions in the distant backcountry. Most of them were located near the city of Belém, or on the island of Marajó and the banks of the lower Tocantins and Guamá rivers, as well as in the outskirts of São Luís. Some of them possessed sugar mills, sugar cane plantations, manioc roots and/or cacao trees, as well as facilities and land for livestock breeding and small workshops bound to produce canoes, furniture, ceramics or cotton cloth (Leite, 1943a, 249 and 279-280; Alden, 1996, 421). An official statistics from 1747 highlights, at the very end of the Jesuit presence in the region, twelve important farms: five in Maranhão (“Anindyba, ad S. Blasium, Prædium Amendijuense, fabrica rei argillaceæ, Prædium Maracuense”) and seven in Grão-Pará (“Marajó, Arari, Jagoarary, Ybiryrajab, Maymijacu, Cruzá, Gibirie”)1. Objects of contention between missionaries, settlers and landowners – especially because of the alleged accumulation of wealth and the retention of native workers by the Jesuits – the farms were frequently cited in documents of the 18th century (Souza Júnior, 2012, 143-329; Neves Neto, 2013, 17-109).

---

1 *Catalogus brevis Personarum V. Provinciae Maragnonensis*, 1747. Biblioteca Pública de Évora, cod. CXV/2-11, nr. 8, fols. 165v-166r.
In the 17th century, the period relevant for this paper, the fazendas of the religious orders, as well as all agricultural and extractivist activities, were still cooperation projects between missionaries and colonial administrators. In fact, the exploitation of indigenous labour force was not even questioned by the Jesuits, as far as it was according to legal regulations. One of the most famous superiors of the Mission, Father Antônio Vieira (2004, 175), defended himself in January 1662 at the court in Lisbon, after having been expelled from the Amazon region for rejecting categorically any kind of Indian slavery:

It is not my intention that there may not be any slaves; after all, I tried at this court, as it is well known, and one can see from my proposal ... that a council of the greatest scholars should be established for this item and that the cases of legal captivity should be defined by law. However, because we [the Jesuits] want the legal ones and are against the illegal ones, they [the settlers] do not like us in that land and, therefore, they throw us out of it.2

Shortly after his arrival to the region in 1653, Vieira had fixed in a regulation — although his authorship is not clearly proved —, that the authorities should care that the Indians, who had been “rescued” during the incursions to the hinterland, had time and land enough to plant and harvest what they needed for their livelihoods3. It is worth mentioning that this proposal was still conceived within a dynamic of extreme mobility of Indians, missionaries and soldiers. Some years later, between 1658 and 1660, when the network of missions was already in full process of consolidation, Father Vieira limited his official orientations concerning the economic activities of the Indians to some criteria regarding the distribution of the labour force among settlers and authorities4.

With regard to the introduction of agricultural methods and tools in the missions, a letter of Father Ascenso Gago from 1695, is very clarifying, for it shows how missionaries and authorities apparently cooperated in the beginning of strategic reductions, such as the one situated in the hills of Ibiapaba5. The systematic style of the report enables to perceive the different steps of the founding process of a typical reduction. Thus, after the act of vassalage and the first catechetical instructions and sacramental rites (such as baptisms and weddings), the missionary in charge introduced a strict timetable in order to make the Indians, considered as being undisciplined, get used to a daily routine. Finally, the priest handed over to the Indian chiefs tools provided by the authorities and by nearby living settlers so that the cultivation of the fields could begin, along with the teaching of craft skills. The letter mentions as well that the Tapuias, speakers of non-Tupi languages, were purposely neglected during the distribution of land and tools, for they were regarded as being less reliable because the nomadic way of life, most of them seemed accustomed to, was interpreted as a proof of their inconstancy6.

The targeted measures of the missionaries and their constant quarrels with the settlers convey the impression that the region was not just seen as a wilderness without little or no possibility of profitable exploitation. In fact, many of the first descriptions of the Amazon valley do not only refer to the legendary Eldorado (Godim, 1994, 11-138), but also point out its natural richness and economic potentialities (Sylveira, 1911; Figueira, 1923; Heriarte, 1874). Nevertheless, the beginning of agricultural and extractivist activities along the Amazon river and its main

---

2 Traduced by the author from a version published in Portuguese in 2004.
3 Modo como se há de governar o gentio que há nas aldeias de Maranhão e Pará. Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, cod. 49-IV-23, nr. 30, fols. 137r/v [§§ 1, 4, 7 and 12].
4 Direção do que se deve observar nas Missões do Maranhão, in Leite, 1943b, 121 [§§ 42 and 43].
5 Carta anua do que se tem obrado na missão da Serra de Ibiapaba, in Leite, 1943a, 38-56.
6 João Felipe Bettendorff, 1990, 157, also refers to the marginalization of Tapuia peoples (Cambocas and Nheengaiba) in the mission farm of Mortigura.
tributaries can only be understood within the context of the turbulences which shook Europe and its newly “discovered” and exploited possessions in the Americas.

2. A century of crisis – the political and economic contexts

Owing to the uninterrupted series of wars, epidemics and conquests that devastated large areas in nearly all continents, historiography considered the 17th century as a time of profound crises. The Portuguese Empire with its global network of trade routes and trading posts was not exempt from these events. In fact, a deep economic depression (1670-1700) accompanied the refolding of the Lusitanian influence, especially in Southern Asia, in the second half of the 17th century and its concentration on the Atlantic space.

There were several reasons for this development that affected the entire colonial world. First, a general recession in Europe and the growing competition of sugar and tobacco produced in the French, English and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean Sea, with the equivalent products from Brazil. Second, the indebtedness of the Portuguese crown as a consequence of the constant quarrels with the Castilians (since the ascent to the throne of the Bragança dynasty in 1640). Finally, the suppression of the long tolerated and profitable smuggling of slaves between the Iberian colonies in South America. In response, like other Western European nations, Portugal began to centralize and rationalize its administrative structures and economic initiatives (by founding trade companies with large participation of influential private merchants). The almost unnoticed pretermission of the Cortes, the Portuguese parliament, which was not convoked between 1679-1680 and 1697-1698, a series of reform oriented decisions and the advent to power of certain personal counsellors of the king (among them the Jesuit Manuel Fernandes and Luís de Meneses, Count da Ericeira) are the most obvious signs of this tendency (Alencastro, 2006, 72-73; Labourdette, 2000, 344-422; Mauro, 1972, 70).

Two kings marked these turbulent times during which the Jesuit mission network was founded and consolidated in the Amazon region: Dom João IV (1640-1656), first king of the Bragança dynasty, and his son Dom Pedro II, (1667/1683-1706). The decade that separates the two reigns was filled out by the regency of Dom João’s widow, Dona Luisa (1656-1662), and the interlude of their unfortunate eldest son, Dom Afonso VI (1662-1667). Without any doubt, one has to highlight the economic policy of Dom Pedro II and his finance minister, the Count da Ericeira, in this context. Appointed in 1675, the count sought to promote domestic production in continental Portugal (mostly the textile and wine sectors) to equalize the trade balance, marked by an excess of imports and a decline in net exports. The measures had clear mercantilist characteristics, such as the introduction of cloth and glass factories and the stipulation of a semi-protectionist tariff for foreign goods. These decisions were aimed to stimulate the consumption of domestic products, both in the motherland and in the colonies. Ericeira’s program gave priority to overseas, particularly to agricultural production in its American possessions7. Yet, the vast agricultural trade depression following an overproduction of sugar and tobacco – two products that had become very popular in Europe – on the international market during the 1680s, and the suicide of the Count da Ericeira, in 1690, left the economic revival of Portugal with its large commercial network unfinished (Serrão and Marques, 2001, 197-213 and 271-274; Bourdon, 1994, 71).

The Jesuits played a decisive role in the application of the plans conceived by Dom Pedro and the Count da Ericeira. Between 1676 and 1682, a series of laws and measures tried to turn the Amazon region, due to its favourable location, into a dynamic centre of production and commerce within the interconnected trade routes under Portugal’s control in the Middle and Southern Atlantic Ocean. In 1680, Father Antônio Vieria helped to formulate a law that turned

7 From 1621 to 1772, the Portuguese possessions in America consisted of two administrative entities: the State of Brazil and the State of Maranhão and Grão-Para (later Grão-Pará and Maranhão).
the labour market more flexible, letting the Indians themselves to chose their employers – but without menacing the Jesuit monopoly over them. However, the sudden outbreak of a second rebellion against the Jesuits, in 1684, interrupted this promising development (Arenz and Silva, 2012, 50-58).

3. The extractivist activities – the importance of the backcountry

The Jesuit missions provided, during the century and a half of their existence, not only huge amounts of drogas do sertão, that is, spices, plants, fruits and vegetable oils gathered in the tropical rain forest and destined to export, but also the necessary labour force for the corresponding activities. The monopoly Father Antonio Vieira had acquired for the Jesuits over all Indian populations, in 1655 and 1680, clearly reveals the political key role the spiritual sons of Saint Ignatius played in the State of Maranhão and Grão-Pará (Perrone-Moisés, 1992, 118-120). Also, the missions proved to be, more than the strategic network of military forts, an efficient means of control of the vast hinterland which can be characterized, according to the words of Daniel Nordman (1998, 40-43), as a “granular frontier”. In fact, the effective presence of the colonizers in this space was reduced to some spots interlinked with one another by very risky waterways that passed through impenetrable forests.

The loss of trading posts on the island of Ceylon and in the Malay Archipelago to the Dutch, in 1640-1641, resulted in a considerable decrease in the supply of spices, especially cloves and cinnamon, in the Portuguese economy. At the court in Lisbon was, therefore, drawn up the plan to replace the South Asian coasts by the Amazon basin, from where the Dutch had just been driven out in the late 1630s, and to define the boundary of the Spanish zone by supporting the expedition of Pedro Teixeira in 1639. In fact, the discovery of some highly valued spices in the Amazon rainforest – such as cacao, sarsaparilla, vanilla, vegetable oils known as andiroba and copaiba or a native species of cotton –, in the 1640s, justified the first hopes concerning the future importance of the region. Other spices from Asia, such as cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg or pepper, were soon joined to the native ones (Cortesão, 1993, 462-463; Leite, 1943b, 158-161)8.

At that time, the rainforest products were very popular in Europe as ingredients for remedy and food. They were not yet cultivated, but gathered and transported in canoes, rowed by the Indians of the missions, to the ports of Belém and São Luís, awaiting the next opportunity to be shipped to the metropolis. In a certain manner, the traditional activity of the Indian peoples to gather plants, roots, leaves and oils was established as a new production system, which included also the commercialization. According to Martine Droulers (2001, 71), this junction of traditional habits and mercantilist logic is contained in the neologism “extractivism”.

Cacao, cloves, vanilla and cinnamon9 were systematically sent to the Portugal from the last quarter of the 17th century, especially by the religious orders, which were exempt of taxes10. At the same time, also non-forest products, such as sugar and tobacco – produced on medium-

---

8 Concerning the spices in the Amazon basin, see Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, sec. ACL-CU-009: 05/09/1648, cx. 3, doc. 00265 (products near Gurupá); 18/09/1648, cx. 3, doc. 00267 (products in the coastal plain of Maranhão); 25/11/1650, cx. 3, doc. 00291 (products in the region of Gurupá); 08/08/1652, cx. 3, doc. 00265 (cultivation of cloves, pepper and nutmeg); 04/08/1661, cx. 4, doc. 00437 (demand to fix the price of native cotton).

9 Cinnamon is a very appreciated spice originally from the Orient. Bettendorff, 1990, 454, reports that he planted in 1689 the seedling of a cinnamon tree from India, offered to him by the king, in the patio of the college in São Luís.

10 Official registers from 1743-1745 show that the Jesuits played a central role in the commercial exchanges between Belém and Lisbon. They were responsible for four fifths of exports dispatched by the religious orders. Cacao made up 78,7 % of the products, followed by cloves (16,1 %), sugar (2,7 %), sarsaparilla (2,1 %) and coffee (0,4 %). See Droulers, 2001, 102-103, and Alden, 1996, 547.
sized farms in the outskirts of São Luís and Belém – were among the export items (Cardoso, 2000, 172-173; Bettendorff, 1990, 648; Leite, 1943b, 153-164, Azevedo, 1930, 153-157)\(^\text{11}\). Other sources, such as the report of Maurício Heriarte (1874, 37-39 and 45), written in 1664, mentions the valleys of the huge tributaries Tapajós, Trombetas and Rio Negro, in the central part of the Amazon basin, as very fertile regions, ideal to produce wild rice, sarsaparilla, sugar cane, manioc, corn or to breed livestock. From the 1690 until the end of the century, various documents stress the “discovery” of new areas, throughout the huge tropical plain, rich in all sorts of *drogas do sertão*\(^\text{12}\).

From the 1670s onwards, cacao became one of the most important products extracted from the rainforest and exported to Europe. The Jesuits became aware of the success of this fruit on the European market and started to cultivate it, involving even the settlers from Maranhão in this enterprise. In a letter written in 1677, Father Bettendorff informs the General Superior:

> I planted twice, three years ago, one thousand cacao trees – one thousand and more developed into adult trees and they are not only producing blossoms but also fruits, which are called cacao and of which is made chocolate. All inhabitants of Maranhão are very happy that this subsidy for themselves, their lives and their businesses was brought, due to my work and effort, from Pará to Maranhão. I already gave to some persons a few fruits. Each one, because it contains beans, will result in, at least, forty-six of such trees. Moreover, as I am in contact with everyone, all will have something from what they will become rich or can live, at least, comfortably. Six trees, or maximum ten, give one arroba, as they call it, one thousand trees give one hundred arrobas, which they sell for more than one thousand cruzados. This year I intend to plant, in order to help the Mission, up to six thousand trees. God, for the propagation of whose glory the planting is done, may provide the growing\(^\text{13}\).

A second letter, written one year later, Bettendorff clarifies that his initiative to plant the cacao trees and, especially, to involve the settlers was due to a request of “the Governor to satisfy the wish of the Most Serene Prince”\(^\text{14}\). In any case, many other letters compounding his official correspondence as superior the Mission and rector of the main college, from 1670 onwards, refer to the cacao as one of the most precious products for the maintenance of the Mission and the colony\(^\text{15}\). In addition, his successor as superior of the Mission, Italian-born Father Pedro Luís Consalvi, stresses the role of Bettendorff in the cacao enterprise by informing the General

---

\(^{11}\) Concerning the recommendations to stimulate the exportation of these products from the Amazon basin, see Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, sec. ACL-CU-009: 20/09/1677, cx. 5, doc. 00614 (gathering of cacao and vanilla); 28/07/1681, cx. 6, doc. 00654 (cultivation of cacao, vanilla and indigo); 10/02/1984, cx. 6, doc. 00693 (density of spices in the valley of the Tocantins); 13/01/1696, cx. 9, doc. 00907 (wood and tobacco designated as new and profitable *drogas*); Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, cod. 51-V-44, fol. 124v, 09/02/1684 (“discovery” of pepper at the seashore of Maranhão and sarsaparilla in the Amazon valley); Bettendorff, 1990, 464 (abundance of wild cacao in the Madeira valley in the 1680s).

\(^{12}\) Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon, sec. ACL-CU-009: 16/10/1674, cx. 5, doc. 00590 (density of spices in the valley of the Tocantins); 13/01/1696, cx. 9, doc. 00907 (wood and tobacco designated as new and profitable *drogas*); Biblioteca da Ajuda, Lisbon, cod. 51-V-44, fol. 124v, 09/02/1684 (“discovery” of pepper at the seashore of Maranhão and sarsaparilla in the Amazon valley); Bettendorff, 1990, 464 (abundance of wild cacao in the Madeira valley in the 1680s).

\(^{13}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 26, fol. 43v (10/09/1677). Traduced from the original text in Latin by the author.

\(^{14}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras Bras 26, fol. 47r (07/05/1678). The prince the letter refers to is Dom Pedro, who was regent from 1667 to 1683, before declaring himself king.

\(^{15}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu: cod. Bras 27, fol. 2v (*Catalogus* of 1671); cod. Bras 26, fol. 27r (21/07/1671); cod. Bras 9, fol. 298r (15/01/1672); cod. Bras 26, fol. 43v (20/09/1677); cod. Bras 26, fol. 47r (07/05/1678); cod. Bras 26, fol. 48v-49r (1678).
Superior that “in a very innovating way, Father Rector planted cacao, out of which is made the chocolate beverage”.

The steadily growing demand of cacao in Europe even motivated colonial authorities to transfer the capital of the colony from São Luís to Belém, because this place gave better access to the cacao produced naturally in the forest and in plantations (Magalhães, 2001, 8; Bettendorff, 1990, 648). Nevertheless, the production and exportation of cacao was not as successful and peaceful as described in the official letters from the 1670s. The oscillations of the market affected this economic activity. In 1691, the Jesuit Father Aloísio Conrado Pfeil mentions a commercial crisis due to the lack of cacao and cloves for exportation after bad harvests. Thirteen years later, already in the 18th century, the settlers complained the supposed excess of the Jesuits in the commerce of cacao, reminding them of their spiritual obligations. Dauril Alden (1996, 546) explains, with regard to this dissatisfaction, that the “Jesuits, along with the other Orders active in the Amazon, produced some cacao on their own plantations, but they depended primarily upon their Amerindian charges in the interior missions to collect it. Such reliance brought the fathers into direct conflict with vested settler interests”.

The gathering of spices and oils in the rainforest, a traditional activity executed by all native peoples of the Amazon Region, was adapted, already in the 17th century, to the necessities of the mercantilist system based on exportation of big amounts of profitable products. The once wild growing cacao tree was even cultivated, at least to a certain extent, for this purpose. Nevertheless, this integration of old Indian practices and knowledges into a far ranging intercontinental trading system did not extinguish their rural character, because the gathering and the cultivation occurred generally in the backcountry. In this context, it is worth mentioning that the lack of metal such as the non-circulation of coins or the reduced access to iron tools avoided a more rapid development (Mauro, 1960, 424-428). For example, cotton cloth served, already in the 1650s and 1660s, as substitute for money to pay services or to realize commercial exchanges (Heriarte, 1874, 9). Thus, a parallel system of traditional trade, without the use of money and nearly no investment in new instruments or methods, contributed to engender a rural world with typical regional features.

4. The agricultural activities – the persistence of Indian traditions

In his description of the Amazon basin, Maurício Heriarte (1874, 69) indicates the possibility of implementing big plantations or farms on the banks and islands of the vast and fertile floodplain in order to cultivate native plants like cacao, urucum and other vegetal dye substances, but also profitable plants from other tropical or semi-tropical regions, such as sugar cane, tobacco or indigo. In this context, this captain of the Portuguese army insists: “There are many and good sites to build big settlements.” According to the writings of Father Bettendorff, the Jesuits seem to have followed these recommendations, because they established farms and missions, as typical rural settlements, throughout the Amazon valley. Especially during the 1650s, more than fifty missions were founded, according to Dauril Alden (1996, 113), by the superior Father Antônio Vieira. Over the years, many of these settlements even specialized in a specific activity (cultivating cotton, making manioc flour or drying fishes) or profession (building canoes or producing ceramics) (Leite 1943a, 99-366).

The network of these strategic establishments turned into an important economic factor, especially in the decades after the first uprising of the settlers and the expulsion of Vieira and other Jesuits, in 1661. Father Bettendorff (1990, 513-514), who had managed to escape the persecution and became local superior in Belém (1662-1663) and São Luís (1663-1668),

16 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 26, fol. 53v (02/08/1678). Traduced from the original text in Latin by the author.
17 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 26, fol. 366v (27/02/1691).
describes his efforts to reconstruct the material base of the two central houses. For that reason, he planted fruit trees, rebuilt the sugar mill, invested in livestock breeding and acquired black slaves. These activities, which had the character of a diversified economy of subsistence, show that the local necessity had still priority. In fact, the farms were situated near the two urban centres and were bound to provide the Jesuit communities of Belém and São Luís with food, furniture, ceramics, wood and other items for daily life. Even before that, the Jesuits cared to found farms in order to deliver all sort of essential products to make run the remote missions, to contact “new” Indians or to satisfy the needs of the crew of the many transport convoys that went up and down the Amazon River.

Thus, in 1661, when Bettendorff was nominated missionary in the Tapajós village – today Santarém – he stopped, on his way to the destination, in the mission farms of Mortigura and Cametá. In the first place, he obtained manioc flour, the staple food of the region, and in the second, he got some living turtles, animals that were or captured in the river or bred at the farm (Bettendorff, 1990, 159). In an extensive report, written in 1665, just four year after his arrival, this missionary gives, as rector of the central residence in São Luís, a general view of the economic conditions of the Mission, detailing the productivity of some farms18. By doing so, he clearly demonstrates his own interest in economics, an interest that later was harshly criticized by Jesuit historian Serafim Leite (1943b, 317-318). He starts with one of the most relevant and prosperous rural establishments:

Seven miles from the town, we possess a farm called Anindiba. It has a chapel dedicated to Saint Ignatius where the servants assist at the divine services and the instruction of doctrine. The whole property occupies a square mile and is very fertile for manioc roots and sugar cane. It has many trees that can be cut easily. Four villages of Indians inhabit our property. In that farm, we have more than sixty servants, little ones and adults all together, to cultivate the fields. A curiboca or cafuzo, that is, a son of an African man and an Indian woman, who is our servant, administers the farm. The poor ones, who are born more to sleep, eat and drink than to work, provide us with manioc flour, that will last one year, corn, oil, liquor or brandy, also cloth made of cotton and other things19.

The report mentions smaller properties near São Luís. One of it is an island that occupies one and a half square mile and on which “lives a fisherman with his wife and children, an African, with an African wife, a daughter and other descendants, and also three servants, and he takes care of a herd of cattle, which includes 67 animals, some goats, about 30 pigs and chicken. The women are our laundresses and weavers20.” The letter continues presenting shortly other rural scenes in farms and missions throughout the delta and the valley of the Amazon, revealing a clear preoccupation with the precarious and oscillating supplies of manioc flour and fish21.

In the official statistics that he sent to the General Superior in 1671, Bettendorff reports the existence of many small properties, generally donated by benefactors. Such as in their big farms, on these land strips the Jesuits produced a large variety of food to sustain the inhabitants of the urban colleges (students and sick missionaries) and, to a lesser extent, products for exports. The superior mentions especially the production of salt and livestock breeding in Maranhão and the growing profitability of sugar, cotton and cacao, as well as manioc flour, in Pará. He also registers

---

18 Two years before, he engaged himself in the reconstruction of the central Jesuit residence and the farms in Maranhão after the uprising of the settlers. For more information, see Bettendorff, 1990, 303-308.
19 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 26, fol. 12v (11/08/1665). Traduced from the original text in Latin by the author.
20 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 26, fol. 12v-13r (11/08/1665).
21 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 26, fol. 13v,16v,14r and 17v (11/08/1665).
that the Indian workers in Maranhão were mainly slaves, while those in Pará were considered as being free.\(^2^2\)

Bettendorff’s description does not only have an economic dimension, but also a sociocultural one, for it points to the existence of a complex system of cross-cultural interactions between Jesuit missionaries, indigenous populations and people of African descent – at a time when the presence of Blacks was still rather uncommon in the Amazon region. In this context, other important aspects are the autonomy and large responsibility apparently entrusted to non-indigenous workers and the non-concentration of Indian workers in some settlements. This “lack of control” can be explained by the fact that most of the thirty missionaries, expelled in 1661, had not yet come back (Arenz, 2010, 272-273). In fact, until 1693, when the Jesuits ceded most of their reductions to other religious orders, a reduced number of missionaries took care of numerous, but precarious, missions (Arenz, 2010, 477-479).

A second report of Bettendorff, written in 1671 after the visit to all Jesuit residences on the Amazon, in his role as superior of the Mission, contains many details concerning the rural character of the missions. The few informations concerning the economic activities refer to the existence of plantations of sugar cane at the big farm of Jaguaripe [Jaguarari] near Belém.\(^2^3\) However, there are other aspects of daily life in a mission settlement in the tropical floodplain, such as the problem of insects. Bettendorff wrote about the mission situated on the island of the Tupinambaranas:

> During daytime, our work was to instruct rude people, at night, a huge amount of flies and mosquitoes attacked us to the point of being impossible to close even one eyes. The Indians themselves slept outside of their houses, around huge bonfires they had built anywhere. The entire village seemed one hell fire – and even then, they actually were not free of flies. At sunset, we had ordered that our canoe should be sent to the middle of the river and by nightfall, we retreated to it – rowing in a smaller canoe – just to be able to sleep at least a little. However, the unbearable plague embarked with us and did not let us rest even one moment.\(^2^4\)

More than such reactions imposed by nature, the long report reveals, between the lines, how much the Indian population knew to preserve its autonomy and agency in a complex interaction system with the missionaries. One can point out three examples, contained in the same report. First, the remote missions, whose missionary was frequently absent due to pastoral obligations or sickness, admitted Indians not yet converted. In relation to the Tupinambaranas mission, Bettendorff remarks that “those who call themselves Christians live mixed up with the heathens, more than in other villages.”\(^2^5\) Second, the Indians were not just put into the missions, but negotiated, for different reasons and interests, their entry and even imposed their own conditions. Bettendorff mentions the Nhunhuns from the Xingu River who, although just contacted, insisted, before their “descent” to a mission, on the sending of a delegation to verify the environment and demanded in advance the concession of fertile land close to the river. The father also reports his encounter, in Cametá, with a group of Aruaquis from the Tocantins valley who declared their desire to transfer themselves into a mission in order to get rid of the

\(^{22}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 27, fol. 2v (1671).

\(^{23}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 9, fol. 262r (21/07/1671).

\(^{24}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 9, fol. 263v (21/07/1671). Traduced from the original text in Latin by the author.

\(^{25}\) Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 9, fol. 263v (21/07/1671). Traduced from the original text in Latin by the author.
persecution of slave hunters and a hostile neighbour nation. Third, shamanist rites persisted in the missions in spite of the daily catechetical instruction and the solemn liturgies. Bettendorff refers to a semi-clandestine ritualistic session of shamans that he discovered and ended up violently in Tapuitapera, one of the oldest missions, near São Luís. The shamans were arrested, but the missionary was nearly attacked by a group of Indian rowers who, very attached to their shamans, wanted take revenge.

Although these observations are not directly related to agriculture, they reveal, nevertheless, the social and cultural background in which the economic activities were situated. To a certain extent, they show a typical feature of rural communities, which is the persistence of traditions, even if these are passing through constant resignification due to frequent interferences from outside. This was the case of the shamanist session in Tapuitapera, which included the imitation of gestures and prayers of Catholic ceremonies taught by the missionaries. In fact, Indian and European cultural elements mingled intensely, thus engendering a new way of living within the rural environment of the missions (Montero, 2006).

In spite of the importance of cultural and social dynamics, labour conditions defined by laws, especially those concerning the services outside the mission, profoundly affected daily life in the mission communities. The Regimento das Missões from 1686 represents a compromise between missionaries and settlers. This law redefines the rules for the annual distribution of the male workers, the periods of their absence and the conditions for their payment. According to the new regulation, half of the men could stay in the missions (and not just a third), but those who were designated for outside work, could stay away for up to six months (instead of three), according to the harvest season (Mattos, 2012, 119 [§§ 14-15]). Other turbulences, which turned the life in the missions extremely precarious, were the epidemics. Two outbreaks of contagious diseases, one in 1661-1662 and another in 1695-1696, devastated entire reductions. Beside the high mortality, the number of Indians fleeing from the missions was considerable (Neves, 2013; Bettendorff, 1990, 214-216 and 587-588).

Despite these nearly regular catastrophic interruptions, the economy tended to develop advantageously. Thus, in 1697, at the very end of the 17th century and one year before his death, Bettendorff (1990, 648-649) informs that a ship bound for Portugal could only be loaded with one third of all the “sugars, tobaccos and, particularly, cloves and cacao” which had been piled up in the port. This brief mention reveals, on the one hand, how much agriculture (sugar, tobacco and cultivated cacao) and extractivism (cloves and “wild growing” cacao) intermingled during the first century of colonization and, on the other hand, how much the Amazon region was far from being a poor and precarious periphery.

5. Conclusions

In summary, four major conclusions that can be drawn. First, the Amazon region was much more characterized, in its colonial development by the numerous rural settlements, especially those founded by religious orders, than by the apparent urban agglomerations around the two seaports. Already the first well reflected reports on the Amazon valley point out the economic potentialities of the region, mainly in its backcountry. Second, the large network of interconnected missions, which was founded between 1620 and 1660 and consisted of rural

---

26 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 9, fol. 260r and 262r (21/07/1671).
27 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, cod. Bras 9, fol. 264r/v (21/07/1671).
28 Concerning the diversity of aspects of the economy in the Amazon region and its central position within the Portuguese trade system, see Chambouleyron, 2010, 121-169.
production centres, contributed, despite all precariousness, to structure long-lastingly this vast “granular” frontier. Third, the agricultural and extractivist activities were, at least throughout the 17th century, a kind of joint ventures maintained by missionaries and authorities, in spite of the harsh conflicts between the two groups, and sustained by an Indian labour force clinging to its traditions and interests. Fourth, Indian knowledges and practices adapted to the necessities of mercantilist trading, forming new production systems which had their own regional character. A certain autonomy of the indigenous population in relation to its fixation in the missions or in their way of life is even recognizable in the reports of the religious although they normally tended to emphasize the passivity or rusticity of the Indians.

Finally, the contribution of Father João Felipe Bettendorff must be highlighted. This Luxembourger missionary, who held important offices between 1662 and 1693, was a central figure in the process of consolidation of the Jesuits missions in the second half of the 17th century. The amount of his writings, consisting of a voluminous chronicle and fifty-three official letters give proof of his historical role, which was formally recognized in 1720, just two decades after his death, by his confrere Domingos de Araújo.

REFERENCES


