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Frontier of Expansion, Frontier of Settlement: Cacao exploitation and the Portuguese colonisation of the Amazon region (17th & 18th Centuries)¹

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Among local products, cacao became one of the most important staples of the Portuguese Amazonian colonial economy, especially during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.² From the 1670s, the crown decided to spur cacao exploitation and cultivation in the region (Figure 1),³ with incentives most likely a result of the news sent from the colony that indicated the commercial potential of its production.

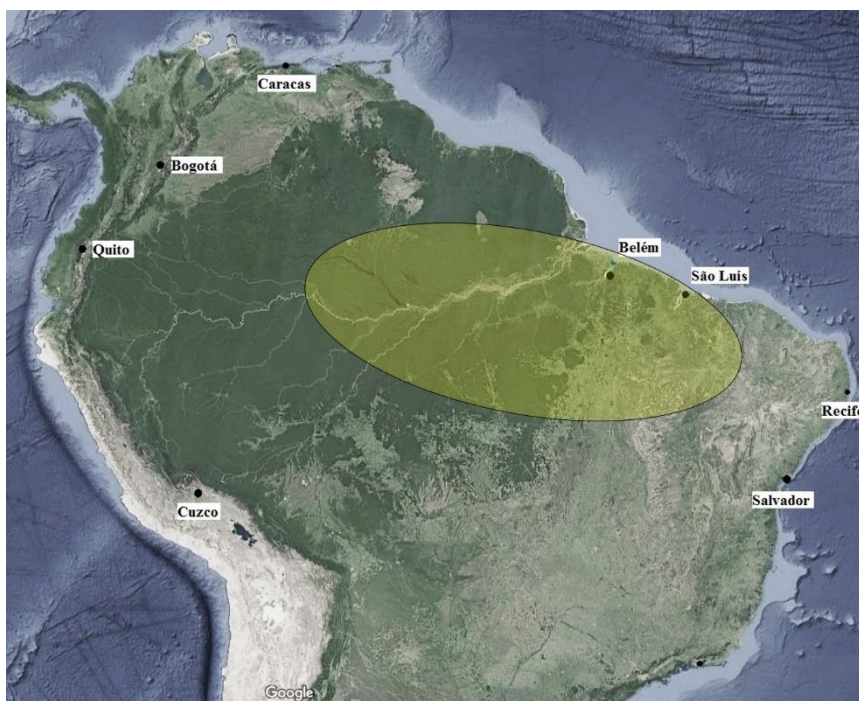


Figure 1 – The Portuguese Amazon Region (State of Maranhão) (17th-18th Century)

¹ This paper was prepared for the international workshop ‘Global Commodity Frontiers in Comparative Context’, University of London, 9-10 December 2016. The research was sponsored by the CNPq. We would like to thank all those who took part in the workshop for their comments and suggestions, as well as Jonathan Curry-Machado, William Clarence-Smith and Simon Jackson, for their comments and corrections of the final text.

² D. Alden, ‘The significance of cacao production in the Amazon region during the late colonial period: an essay in comparative economic history’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 120:2 (1976), pp.103-35; W. G. Clarence-Smith, *Cocoa and chocolate, 1765-1914*, London: Routledge, 2000, pp.166-72).

³ F. Mauro, *Le Portugal et l’Atlantique au XVII^e siècle, 1570-1670. Étude économique*, Paris: SEVPEN, 1960, p.370; Alden (1976), p.115; R. Chambouleyron, ‘Cacao, Bark-clove and Agriculture in the Portuguese Amazon region, Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century’, *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 51:1 (2014), pp.7-10.

While Jesuits were the pioneers in this,⁴ the influence of Spanish exploitation of cacao had echoed in the region (and, thus, in the papers received at the Court from the colony) well before. Although it is a product native to the Amazon region,⁵ the Portuguese ‘discovered’ its potential in the second half of the seventeenth century influenced by the experience of the Spanish American colonies. Venezuelan success in the production of cultivated cacao, in particular, persuaded Portuguese authorities both in Europe and in the colony of the importance of developing its exploitation.⁶ This was undertaken not only by incentives to cacao cultivation (through concessions of land grants, called *sesmarias*),⁷ but also by encouraging its exploitation in the hinterland, through the gathering of wild fruits (*cacau bravo*).

Cacao exploitation in Portuguese Amazonia offers an interesting example of how commodities were elements of a wide territorial expansion in colonial times – a peculiarity of the Portuguese Amazon region. In fact, contrary to most of the exploitation of cacao in colonial Spanish America (in Central America, Ecuador and Venezuela), Portuguese Amazonian cacao was both cultivated by settlers and missionaries, as well as widely gathered in the vast hinterland (the *sertões*).

There was a double spatial dimension of cacao production in this region: one related to the far-reaching hinterland, and the other to the cultivated lands closer to the city of Belém. This characteristic can be explained also by the centrifugal nature of Amazonian colonial society and economy. In fact, Amazonian society moved towards the frontiers of the forest. From the seventeenth century onwards, the Portuguese not only exploited the hinterland in search of rainforest products, gathered mainly by Indians, but also found in the same *sertões* the main source of the labour force itself, through enslavement of Indians and the organisation of a free Indian labour system, as will be examined later.

Actually, one can state, as Robert Bartlett suggested for Medieval Europe, the existence of two frontiers in the region.⁸ On the one hand, an ‘internal’ frontier, characterised by the intensification of settlement, such as the expansion of land grants and the development of a rural area close to the city of Belém (Figure 2). On the other hand, an ‘expansive’ frontier, alongside of which war against Indians, enslavement, exploitation of the hinterland products (such as cacao and clove bark⁹), negotiations with Indian groups and boundary disputes with the

⁴ S. Leite, *História da Companhia de Jesus no Brasil*, Vol.4, Lisbon/Rio de Janeiro: Portugália/INL, 1943, pp.158-61; D. Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise. The Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire and Beyond, 1540-1750*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, pp.546-7; T. Walker, ‘Slave labor and chocolate in Brazil: the culture of cacao plantations in Amazonia and Bahia (17th–19th centuries)’, *Food & Foodways*, 15 (2007), pp.85-9.

⁵ C. R. Clement, C. R., ‘Origin and Domestication of Native Amazonian Crops’, *Diversity*, 2 (2010), pp.78-80.

⁶ Historiography stresses the role played by New Christians, i.e. Jews officially converted to Catholicism, in cacao world trade since the 17th century, especially during the Iberian Monarchy of Spain and Portugal (1580-1640). See S. M. Hordes, ‘The Inquisition as Economic and Political Agent: The Campaign of the Mexican Holy Office against the Crypto-Jews in the Mid-Seventeenth Century’, *The Americas*, 39:1 (1982), pp.23-38; Clarence-Smith (2000), p. 94; R. Ferry, ‘Trading cacao: a view from Veracruz, 1626-1645’. *Nouveaux mondes mondes nouveaux* (2006), at <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/document1430.html>.

⁷ R. Chambouleyron, ‘Como se hace en Indias de Castilla. El cacao entre la Amazonía portuguesa y las Indias de Castilla (siglos XVII y XVIII)’, *Revista Complutense de Historia de América*, 40 (2014), pp.23-43.

⁸ R. Bartlett, *The making of Europe. Conquest, colonization and cultural change, 950-1350*, London: Penguin Books, 1994, p.2.

⁹ *Dicypellium caryophyllatum*. The bark of a tree with similar smell and taste as the Indian clove.

neighbouring colonies of the Netherlands, France and Spain played a crucial role. The dilation of this ‘external’ frontier westward was intertwined with the expansion of agriculture (the ‘internal’ frontier), from the end of the seventeenth century onwards.¹⁰



Figure 2 – Region of Cultivated Cacao (17th until mid-18th Century)

In fact, in the ‘internal’ frontier, the Portuguese cultivated manioc for the production of flour and sugar cane for the production of rum, both products being essential for the long journeys to the vast hinterland – the ‘external’ frontier. On the other side, Indians brought from the *sertões* were the main labourers of the settlers’ estates in the ‘internal frontier’, where the Portuguese also cultivated cacao. Those same labourers were sent to the hinterland in search of more forest products and slaves.

This particularity linked its exploitation to the expansion of Portuguese dominion in the region, and to the complex circuits of American Indian slavery and compulsory labour. Not only was cacao planted by Indian labourers, but also indigenous knowledge of the tropical environment and climate was fundamental for the gathering of the cacao in the hinterland and its transportation to the main Amazonian seaport at Belém. From there, it was shipped, via Lisbon, to the European market, where it was highly appreciated as a fortifying beverage and as medicine.

The main argument of this paper is that the exploitation of a commodity – in this case, the Amazonian cacao and the way it was produced – led to the expansion of the Portuguese colonial frontiers in the region, both internal and external. Forest products (including cacao), as

¹⁰ R. Chamboleyron, ‘Uma sociedade colonial em expansão: o Maranhão e Grão-Pará de meados do século XVII a meados do século XVIII’, in L. Hulsman and M. O. S. Cruz (eds.), *Fazenda e trabalho na Amazônia, mão de obra nas Guianas: o caso de Berbice (1726-1736)*, Boa Vista, Editora da UFRR, 2016, pp.13-39.

well as Indian compulsory labour, played a crucial role in the opening of new territories for the Portuguese. Both were part of a centrifugal society, which began to expand at the end of the seventeenth century, and especially during the first decades of the eighteenth century. In this text, we will examine the particularities of Amazonian cacao exploitation, analysing its cultivation, gathering in the *sertões*, and its relation to Indian compulsory labour.

Land grants and the *sertões*

Cacao was cultivated on many of the settlers' estates especially in the Amazon delta region. Officially, land was granted by the governors on behalf of the king, who then had to confirm the concession. However, although confirmed by the monarch, mainly throughout the first half of the eighteenth century, many of these land grants (*sesmarias*) had already been occupied by Portuguese colonisers from the 1690s onwards. In fact, many settlers demanded a concession of plots they were already cultivating. In general, all over Portuguese America, tenure of the land and its economic exploitation were the main arguments for the concession of land grants.¹¹ The formula 'possessing and cultivating', in fact, was a common phrase in the petitions. In 1703, for example, Teresa de Melo Maciel claimed she had been living from her cultivation of food crops and cacao "for more than fourteen years", a reason why she asked for a royal confirmation of her lands.¹² The same year, Manuel Lopes Reis demanded the confirmation of the lands he had occupied ten years earlier and on which he had planted three thousand cacao trees.¹³ In 1714, Felipe Marinho stated in his plea that for more than fifteen years he had been cultivating his lands with cacao and annatto.¹⁴

From the end of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century, one can state that the captaincy of Pará, closer to the Atlantic seashore, constituted a rather open frontier for land occupation. Thus, the captaincy's capital, the city of Belém, was gradually surrounded by land grants. The size of these *sesmarias* was variable, but they usually did not surpass a length of two leagues, since at the end of his reign, Dom Pedro II (1683-1706) established limits for their concession.

Usually, planters cultivated a number of crops. Many of these are impossible to identify, since the documents solely refer to them as *lavouras* and *roças*, which meant lands devoted to agricultural activities. In the case of the Colonial Amazon, these terms probably indicated the cultivation of manioc (the primary starch-rich food of Portuguese America adapted from indigenous agriculture) and also other subsistence provisions (*mantimentos*). Thus, in 1702, Mateus de Carvalho e Siqueira had in his lands sugar cane (for his alembic), cacao and some cattle.¹⁵ In 1721, Domingos de Araújo and Inácio Marques stated they had cultivated manioc as

¹¹ E. F. Neves, 'Sesmarias em Portugal e no Brasil', *Politeia. História e Sociedade*, 1:1 (2001), pp.111-39; N. Nozoe, 'Sesmarias e apossamento de terras no Brasil colônia', *Revista Economia*, 7:3 (2006), pp.587-605; C. O. Alveal, 'Converting land into property in the Portuguese Atlantic world, 16th-18th century', PhD thesis, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University, 2007, p. 211.

¹² Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Pará-Avulsos, doc. 1960.

¹³ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Chancelaria de Dom Pedro II, livro 45, fls. 318-319.

¹⁴ ANTT, Chancelaria de Dom João V, livro 44, fls. 124-125.

¹⁵ ANTT, Chancelaria de Dom Pedro II, livro 27, fls. 294-295.

well as four to five thousand trees of cacao.¹⁶ Some years later, Manuel Gomes Rocha claimed that he was one of the largest planters in the captaincy, having cultivated not only cacao, but also manioc, beans, cotton and “many ‘lavouras’”.¹⁷

As mentioned before, one particularity of Portuguese Amazonian society was the crucial role played by rivers and the hinterland (called the *sertões*) in its colonisation throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Cacao cultivation was concentrated on the Acará, Guamá and Moju rivers that flow into the Guajará Bay in front of the city of Belém (in the Amazon delta region, see Figure 2). Data suggest that the Crown’s effort to promote a cacao industry in the Amazon met with some success. The use of the words *cacaual* (a kind of cacao orchard) and *fazenda* (farm) of cacao in the land grants indicates the existence of a concentrated plantation of cacao, differing from the ‘wild cacao’ found in the surrounding forests, which needed to be gathered. Moreover, many of the settlers explicitly stated they were ‘planting’ or ‘cultivating’ cacao on their lands.

Table 1 – Amount of cultivated cacao trees

Source: APEP, Sesmarias, Livros 1 to 14; ANTT, Chancelarias Régias, Dom Pedro II and Dom João V

Name	Trees in thousands	Year	Name	Trees in thousands	Year
Feliciano Primo dos Santos	1	1744	Francisca Bernarda Pereira	5	1742
Francisco Cordovil	1	1738	Inês de Couto	5	1703
Antônio Travassos de Miranda	1.5	1718	Leão Pereira de Barros	5	1702
Francisco de Melo Palheta	1.5	1731	Amaro Pinto Vieira	6	1732
Estevão Cardoso de Meneses	2	1731	José de Costa Tavares	6	1702
Gregório Esteves de Melo	2	1752	Mateus de Carvalho e Siqueira	6	1702
Bernardino de Carvalho	2.5	1727	Sebastião de Sousa	6	1733
Manuel Coelho	2.5	1750	Xavier de Sousa de Ataíde	6	1718
Luís de Faria Esteves	3	1718	Custódio Vicente Anastácio	7	1732
Manuel Alves de Lima	3	1702	Catarina Álvares	8	1700
Manuel de Braga	3	1703	Gonçalo Soares Muniz	12	1737
Manuel Lopes Reis	3	1703	José da Cunha de Toar	12	1728
Manuel Martins Távora	3	1729	Silvestre Vilasboas	12	1707
Manuel de Passos Moura	4	1711	Antônio de Paiva de Azevedo	15	1702
Manuel de Passos Moura	4	1718	Custódio Vicente Anastácio	15	1737
Manuel Portal de Carvalho	4	1746	Matias Ferreira Bitencourt	17.8	1728
Domingos de Araújo Inácio Marques	4 to 5	1721	Cláudio Antônio de Almeida	20	1740
Francisco Gonçalves da Silva	4 to 5	1739	José da Silveira Goulart	36	1733
Estevão Geraldês Meireles	5	1725			

¹⁶ ANTT, Chancelaria de Dom João V, livro 60, fls. 274v-276.

¹⁷ ANTT, Chancelaria de Dom João V, livro 71, fls. 324-324v.

During the period from the 1690s until 1755 (before the introduction of a trade monopoly in the region), there are references to approximately 860 land grants that governors distributed among settlers in the vast captaincy of Pará. A little more than a quarter of the land grants (222) mention, albeit not exclusively, the cultivation of cacao. From these, 60 percent had already been occupied and almost 40 percent were claimed by settlers who stated that they had not yet planted cacao, but intended to do so.¹⁸ Unfortunately, there is no way of measuring cacao production from these lands. Only scattered data concerning the number of trees (*pés*) could be gathered from the land granted to settlers who were already occupying their lands, but no information could be found about production (see Table 1).

The gathering of cacao remained important throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Data from the registrar of the Royal Treasury of Pará, between 1700 and 1702 – the only systematic series one could find for the Treasury – indicate that in this period, 226 canoes went to the *sertão* for cacao and clove bark, paying the corresponding taxes to the Treasury officials.¹⁹ In the late 1720s and early 1730s, data from the religious orders' estates and Indian villages (located in the far-reaching hinterland) indicate that wild cacao was far more exploited than the cultivated one. However, the clerics could count on the labour of the many Indians from the missionary villages they administered in the *sertões*, to the extent that the survey of their production was organised by estate and Indian village. In fact, the Jesuits' plantations produced only 5.8 percent of the total amount of goods generated by the Society of Jesus. In the case of the Carmelites, cultivated cacao consisted only 9.5 percent of their production.²⁰

Data on land grants indicate a clear intensification of cacao cultivation, especially from the 1730s onwards, and data related to cacao in the hinterland point out an intensification of the gathering activities. These two economic dynamics characterised the double nature and expansion of cacao exploitation in the Portuguese Amazon region.

The expansion of cacao

Planted cacao, produced on lands granted by the Crown, coexisted with the gathering of cacao in the *sertões*. According to Dauril Alden, the Amazonian cacao boom began in the mid-1720s, when the product eventually found a “dependable market”.²¹ This led, on the one hand, to the substantial increase of the number of canoes to gather the fruits in the *sertão*.²² On the other

¹⁸ These land grants are registered in three archives: Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT), Lisbon, Portugal (series: Chancelarias Régias and Registo Geral de Mercês); Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Lisbon, Portugal (series: Pará, Avulsos and Maranhão, Avulsos); and Arquivo Público do Estado do Pará (APEP), Belém, Brazil (series: Sesmarias).

¹⁹ Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Manuscripts Occidentaux, Fonds Portugais, 39. The canoes used in colonial times for transportation on the Amazonian rivers were embarkations of different types and sizes with a considerable capacity for trade goods. Normally they had a crew of 14 or 16 indigenous rowers supervised by a pilot. In general, the construction of the colonial canoes followed traditional Indian techniques (E. A. C. Ferreira, 'Oficiais canoeiros, remeiros e pilotos jacumaúbas: mão de obra indígena na Amazônia Colonial Portuguesa (1733-1777)', MPhil thesis, Belém: Universidade Federal do Pará, 2016, pp.58-109).

²⁰ AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 1223.

²¹ Alden (1976), p. 118.

²² Alden (1976), p. 119.

hand, data from the land grants reveal that between the 1690s and 1755, 84 percent of the settlers demanding new and unoccupied lands for the cultivation of cacao made their pleas after the 1720s.

Unfortunately, there is no possibility of any precise measuring of cacao cultivation and gathering, since we could not find any systematic reference or official statistic related to the production of Amazonian cacao for the seventeenth and early eighteenth century – a recurrent problem for this period. Cacao cultivation rarely appears in the documents before the end of the seventeenth century. Crude export data exist systematically only from 1730 onwards, and reveal how cacao became the most important product of the Amazonian economy. The fluctuation of its position within the totality of the region’s exports for the period between 1730 and 1755, however, is significant, ranging from 97 percent in 1736 to 44 percent in 1755. Only in two years, cacao represented a little less than half of the entire exports of the Amazon region. In fifteen years, it represented more than 80 percent of all the products shipped from the Amazon region to Portugal. Even when the price drastically dropped in 1747 to less than a fifth of the price of each *arroba* of cacao beans in 1730, cacao maintained its position as the main staple of Amazonian economy (see Table 2).²³

Table 2 – Cacao exports (1725-1755)

Source: AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 6627

Year	% exports	Price per arroba (in réis)	Total arrobas	Year	% exports	Price per arroba (in réis)	Total arrobas
1725	–	–	30,000.00 ²⁴	1743	86.35%	1500	63,299.10
1730	86.22%	4800	22,064.22	1744	90.40%	1500	74,511.23
1731	86.43%	4800	16,299.70	1745	72.26%	1200	57,129.31
1732	91.30%	4800	32,741.31	1746	80.28%	1200	7,018.20
1733	92.54%	4800	26,184.11	1747	64.99%	900	85,299.90
1734	96.15%	4800	44,170.00	1748	–	–	–
1735	80.73%	4200	22,286.60	1749	64.16%	1200	57,515.23
1736	96.66%	3600	43,893.40	1750	63.61%	1000	69,837.31
1737	90.34%	3600	27,906.40	1751	46.61%	1000	35,221.13
1738	93.13%	3600	31,285.24	1752	58.31%	1000	19,649.10
1739	90.64%	3600	34,209.13	1753	53.03%	1100	70,537.40
1740	91.98%	3000	33,527.18	1754	64.01%	1100	10,305.21
1741	95.08%	2800	57,726.19	1755	43.53%	1000	58,000.11
1742	92.51%	2400	56,170.25				

There is still much to understand about the colonial trade of Amazonian cacao. Initial research in the import records in Portugal taxed at the *Casa da Índia e Mina* (which excluded

²³ AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 6627.

²⁴ Information given by Governor João da Maia da Gama, on September 1725. AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 777.

sugar and tobacco), for the years 1749 to 1755, indicated that cacao from the Amazon region represented almost 24 percent of the *Casa da Índia*'s revenues.²⁵ As regards its production, what is also striking is that during the first half of the eighteenth century, the steady growth of the tithes in the captaincy of Pará was significant. In 1697, tithes resulted in the sum of 24,000 *cruzados*, in 1706 they were 37,000 *cruzados*. Sums more than tripled from 1731 and 1734, when cacao exploitation boom began, and almost doubled in 1748 (see Table 3). This increase confirms the growing economy of cacao. Since the religious orders, especially the Jesuits, systematically avoided the payment of the tithes, by insisting on their tax-exempt status (which led to a series of conflicts between colonial authorities and the priests), the specified sums can be interpreted as an indication of the settlers' exploitation of cacao, both on their own lands and in the hinterland.²⁶

Table 3 – Bidding of tithes

Source: Chambouleyron, 2005; Lima, 2006; Neves Neto, 2017

Ano	Bids (in <i>cruzados</i>)
1697	24,000.00
1706	37,000.00
1725	42,000.00
1731	42,000.00
1734	145,000.00
1737	148,000.00
1740	148,000.00
1743	170,000.00
1746	182,000.00
1749	250,000.00

Labour force and cacao

The expansion of the cacao economy needed labourers, who during the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century did not come from Africa, as was the case in many of the cacao plantations of Spanish America. Instead, the growth of the Amazonian economy, owing to the intensification of cacao exploitation both in the hinterland and on cultivated lands, was intertwined with the Indian slave trade as well as with an intricate compulsory work system based on free Indians.

In the Portuguese Amazon region, indigenous labour, both free and slave, was a complex and complicated issue that mobilised the Crown, colonial authorities (lay and ecclesiastical), settlers, the missionaries, and of course the Indian themselves. In fact, it was not the legitimacy

²⁵ There were specific customs for sugar and tobacco. Amazonian cacao was taxed at the *Casa da Índia*. ANTT, Alfândega de Lisboa, *Casa da Índia, Direitos de Entrada*, livros 143, 37 & 17.

²⁶ R. M. Neves Neto, *Um Patrimônio em Contendas: os bens jesuíticos e a magna questão dos dízimos no Estado do Maranhão e Grão-Pará (1650-1750)*, Jundiá: Paco Editorial, 2013, pp.111-50.

of Indian slavery – officially only allowed within certain circumstances – but its interpretation and regulation that constantly opposed the different colonial agents.²⁷

Even if the Crown tried insistently to prevent settlers and even officials from unlawfully enslaving Indians in the hinterland, illegal seizure was a common practice for the whole period. Unfortunately, for the late seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century, there is no way of measuring enslavement (legal or illegal), and the use of free Indian labourers, with a certain reliability. Nevertheless, Miguel da Rosa Pimentel, the highest judicial authority in the colony, accused the settlers of behaving like “rulers of the *sertão*” after having passed the last canoe control at the fortress of Gurupá, mistreating and enslaving the Indians indiscriminately.²⁸ Some time before, the governor of Maranhão explicitly stated to the Overseas Council that he had decided not to punish those involved in illegal enslavement, since he had found out that virtually all the settlers were involved, so that punishment could “devastate the whole colony”. His opinion was shared by a high Crown official at court who warned that there were numerous examples in history in which the “multitude of criminals prevented punishment and facilitated pardon to all or to almost everyone”.²⁹ One year later, the king himself issued a general pardon to the settlers, determining, nevertheless, that all Indians enslaved against his laws were to be considered free (although the authorities had to send the freed slaves to the missionary villages, not to their own original communities).³⁰

As regards free Indian labour force, since the mid-sixteenth century, the Portuguese had adopted a system of catechesis that compelled the Indians to settle in specific villages, conceived for this specific purpose by the religious orders, especially the Jesuits. Besides regular indoctrination, the natives were constrained to work for the settlers, the Crown and the fathers themselves, although preserving their free status.³¹ This was the basis of a system of free Indian labour that was adopted a century later in the Amazon region.

²⁷ B. A. Sommer, ‘Colony of the sertão: Amazonian expeditions and the Indian slave trade’, *The Americas*, 61:3 (2005), pp.401-28; A. D. Carvalho Júnior, ‘Índios cristãos: a conversão dos índios na Amazônia portuguesa (1653-1769)’, PhD thesis, Campinas: Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2005; M. E. A. S. Mello, *Fé e império: as Juntas das Missões nas conquistas portuguesas*, Manaus: EdUA, 2009, pp.243-317; C. L. Dias, ‘Civildade, cultura e comércio: os princípios fundamentais da política indigenista na Amazônia (1614-1757)’, MPhil thesis, São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 2009; T. M. Neves, ‘O lícito e o ilícito: a prática dos resgates no Estado do Maranhão na primeira metade do século XVIII’, *Revista Estudos Amazônicos*, VII:1 (2012), pp.253-73; C. L. Dias, ‘L’Amazonie avant Pombal. Politique, Economie, Territoire’, PhD thesis, Paris: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2014, pp.91-178; F. A. Bombardi, ‘Pelos interstícios do olhar do colonizador: descimentos de índios no Estado do Maranhão e Grão-Pará (1680-1750)’, MPhil thesis, São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo, 2014; A. C. Pelegrino, ‘Donatários e poderes locais no Maranhão seiscentista (1621-1701)’, MPhil thesis, Niterói: Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2015, pp.60-161; C. L. Dias & F. A. Bombardi, ‘O que dizem as licenças? Flexibilização da legislação e recrutamento particular de trabalhadores indígenas no Estado do Maranhão (1680-1755)’, *Revista de História*, 175 (2016), pp.249-80.

²⁸ ‘Informação do Estado do Maranhão’, 1692, *Biblioteca da Ajuda*, cod. 50-V-34, n. 43, fol. 199.

²⁹ ‘O governador do Estado do Maranhão Artur de Saa e Meneses dà conta em como os mais dos moradores daquelle Estado haviaõ feito resgates de escravos contra as ordens de S.Mg.^{de}’, 7 October 1690. AHU, cod. 274, fols. 69v-70

³⁰ ‘Traslado do Alvara, porque Sua Magestade ordena se tirem por forros os escravos feytos contra a sua ley dos resgates’, 6/02/1691. *Regimento & Leys sobre as Missoens do Estado do Maranhão, & Parà, & sobre a Liberdade dos Indios*. Lisboa Occidental: Na Officina de Antonio Menescal, 1724, p.36-39.

³¹ Concerning these questions, see Alden (1996), pp.474-527; C. A. M. R. Zeron, *Linha de fé: A Companhia de Jesus e a escravidão no processo de formação da sociedade colonial (Brasil, séculos XVI e XVII)*, São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2011.

Due to the fact that in the State of Maranhão the Indians formed the main source of labour force throughout the colonial period, the use of natives living in the missionary villages was a bone of contention. Although the settlers, clerics and the Crown did not dispute the legitimacy of Indian compulsory work, its regulation and implementation were constantly bargained. One of the most controversial issues was the annual distribution of labourers from the missions to the settlers.³²

Since Amazonian society and Portuguese dominion were expanding towards its frontiers from the late seventeenth century, this dilation had a strong influence both on the slave and free Indian labour system. In fact, as with cacao, American Indian slaves and free Indians were to be found in the far hinterland. The advance of territorial occupation meant not only the increase of settlement, but also the exploration of new *sertões* in the search of: 1) more Amazonian spices, such as cacao, clove bark, sarsaparilla³³ and copaiba balm³⁴; 2) Indian slaves, purchased from Indian groups, captured in authorised wars or simply illegally enslaved; and 3) free Indians, who were brought from the hinterland to the Indian mission villages, known as *aldeias*, and administered by missionaries (mainly Jesuits, but also Franciscans, Carmelites and Mercedarians).

Thus, the hinterland and the agricultural region in the Amazon River delta (Figure 3) were closely linked.³⁵ The city of Belém, in the captaincy of Pará, represented the heart of a system in which canoes full of slaves and spices arrived from the *sertões*, and journeys departed to the hinterland; but also ships arrived and departed from and to Lisbon, carrying Amazonian products, as well as African slaves, European products, new settlers, soldiers and colonial authorities.

³² M.C. Kiemen, *The Indian Policy of Portugal in the Amazon Region, 1614-1693*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1954; M. E. A. S. Mello, 'O Regimento das Missões: poder e negociação na Amazônia portuguesa', *Clio – Revista de Pesquisa Histórica*, 27:1 (2009), pp.46-75; K. H. Arenz, 'Entre supressão e consolidação: os aldeamentos jesuíticos na Amazônia portuguesa (1661-1693)', in S. C. C. Almeida et al. (eds.), *Políticas e estratégias administrativas no mundo atlântico*, Recife: Editora Universitária da UFPE, 2012, pp.311-335.

³³ An Amazonian variety of the *Smilax* genus. It was used to cure venereal diseases, to lose weight and as diaphoretic and diuretic.

³⁴ An Amazonian variety of the *Copaifera* genus. It was used to cure tuberculosis and gonorrhoea, but also to alleviate pain in case of kidney stones and urinary infection.

³⁵ R. Chambouleyron, 'A prática dos sertões na Amazônia colonial (século XVII)', *Outros Tempos*, 10:15 (2013), pp.93-5; N. Ravena & R. E. A. Marin, 'Teia de relações entre índios e missionários a complementaridade vital entre o abastecimento e o extrativismo na dinâmica econômica da Amazônia Colonial', *Varia Historia*, 29:50 (2013), pp.395-420; Dias (2014b), p.292.



Figure 3 – The Delta Region (Agriculture, in yellow) and the *Sertões* (Gathering, in blue)

One can follow the links between the economic expansion of cacao and the increase of labour demand by examining data related to official requests to purchase Indian slaves (the so-called *resgates*), as well as demands to bring free Indians from the *sertão* (the so-called *descimentos*). Unfortunately, as mentioned above, these records are far from being systematic, for they are scattered throughout the most diverse sources. Thus, from the 222 land grants related to the cultivation of cacao, we could find reference to 55 settlers with some information concerning Indian labour. Few of these references, however, indicate the size of the cacao estates.

In 1732, for example, Amaro Pinto Vieira requested a land grant claiming that he had six thousand trees of cacao, and 60 “servants”.³⁶ Although there is no way of confirming the number of his labourers, eight years later he was granted an authorisation to purchase 30 slaves in the *sertão*, and 50 more in 1744.³⁷ José da Silveira Goulart, who claimed in 1731 that he had planted 36 thousand trees,³⁸ lost 22 of his labourers in the great epidemic of measles in the late 1740s.³⁹ Another big planter of cacao, Cláudio Antônio de Almeida, received his lands initially in 1731.⁴⁰ In 1740, he reported having planted 20 thousand trees in his two leagues of land alongside the Capim river.⁴¹ In 1728, he had received a grant of 25 to 30 free Indians or slaves for the cultivation of cacao he allegedly would initiate.⁴² In 1744, he received a new grant to

³⁶ APEP, Sesmarias, livro 6, fls. 89v-90.

³⁷ Livro dos Termos da Junta das Missões, transcribed in P. D. Wojtalewicz, ‘The ‘Junta das Missões’: The Missions in the Portuguese Amazon’, MPhil thesis, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993, pp.118 & 137.

³⁸ APEP, Sesmarias, livro 8, fls. 32v-33v.

³⁹ AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 3001.

⁴⁰ APEP, Sesmarias, livro 6, fls. 47-47v.

⁴¹ APEP, Sesmarias, livro 10, fls. 27v-28.

⁴² Bombardi (2014), p.184.

buy 50 slaves in the *sertões* of the Japurá River, located in the faraway western part of the Amazon basin.⁴³

For the 55 settlers who were already planting cacao or intended to do so (eight of them before the 1720s), we could find reference to a little more than 2,500 Indians referred to as slaves or as free workers. Many of these grants, however, were mere permissions to buy Indian slaves in the hinterland or to bring free Indians from the *sertão*. There is no certainty whether or exactly how many of these authorisations were indeed put into practice. Moreover, the difficulties of the Indian slave trade, during the second quarter of the eighteenth century, reduced significantly the number of Indians that arrived at Belém to be distributed among planters. In addition, since cacao was never an exclusive crop, there is no way of measuring with any precision how many of the Indians really worked in the cacao fields. Many of these indigenous labourers, both free and slave, could also be used for the gathering of cacao (as well as many other spices) in the hinterland, since, as mentioned before, there was no exclusivity between the exploitation of *cacau bravo* (wild) and *cacau manso* (cultivated).

According to Camila Dias and Fernanda Bombardi, who analysed the available data concerning authorisations to purchase slaves or bring free Indians from the *sertão*, from 1690 until 1745, the increase of labour demand corresponds to the expansion of Amazonian economy.⁴⁴ Numbers indicate how owners of land grants dedicated to the cultivation of cacao, especially after the 1720s, mobilised a complex and extensive mechanism of Indian labour exploitation. In addition, epidemics of smallpox, which ravaged Indian population in 1725-26 and in 1743-44 increased the necessity for labourers. Analysing settlers' demands for slaves and free Indians, historiography has shown how the aftermath of these demographic calamities encouraged certain groups within the colonial society to take initiatives in order to foster enslavement or the purchase of free Indians from the *sertões*.⁴⁵

Clerics and cacao

A clearer picture of cacao cultivation, Indian slavery and compulsory work is provided by analysing the Jesuits' estates. From the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the missionaries promoted not only the annual gathering of cacao, but also its cultivation in the key places of their far-reaching mission network. In their attempt to create a solid economic foundation for their catechetical task, especially after their violent expulsion from the colony between 1661 and 1663 (a reaction of the settlers against the fathers' monopoly over the free Indian labour force), the Society of Jesus invested with more intensity in the production and exportation of cacao. The fathers were aware of the huge demand for cacao beans in Europe. In fact, cacao

⁴³ Livro dos Termos da Junta das Missões, transcribed in Wojtalewicz (1993), p.135.

⁴⁴ Dias & Bombardi (2016).

⁴⁵ R. Wright, *História Indígena e do Indigenismo no Alto Rio Negro*, Campinas: Mercado das Letras, 2005, pp.27-82; C. L. Dias, 'O Livro das Canoas – uma descrição', in *Anais do IV Encontro Internacional de História Colonial*, vol.11, Belém: Açaí, 2014, pp.57-70; Bombardi (2014), pp.86-115.

was highly appreciated in new medical treatments, as a fortifier (due to its nutritious values), but also as a beverage of social prestige, especially in vogue among noble and rich families.⁴⁶

The Superior of the Amazon Mission at that time, Father João Felipe Bettendorff, from Luxembourg, was especially engaged in the diffusion and cultivation of cacao trees in the whole colony. All through the 1670s, he regarded cacao as one of the key products, besides clove bark, cotton and sugar, suitable to improve the profitability of the Maranhão Mission, as the Jesuits' administrative circumscription in the Amazon was called.⁴⁷ In his writings, Bettendorff highlights his attempts to plant cacao trees in the captaincy of Pará. In a letter from 1677 to the General Superior Giovanni Paolo Oliva in Rome, he gives a more precise information concerning his way of proceeding:

Three years ago [1674], I have planted twice one thousand cacao seedlings, of which thousand turned into trees. Besides the blossoms, they are already producing fruits which are called cacao and of which is made the chocolate. All inhabitants of the Maranhão Captaincy are very content with this new subsidy for their lives and their businesses which was brought, thanks to my care and zeal, from Pará to Maranhão. I have given to certain persons cacao fruits, of which each specimen contains at least forty-six grains. These fruits produced an equal number of trees. And as I am willing to go on sharing with these people, they will have something to become rich in the future or, at least, to live from decently now. Six or maximum ten trees produce per year one *arroba*, as the weight measure is called here. One thousand trees will give one hundred *arrobas* [of cacao beans], which are sold for more than one thousand *cruzados*. This year I intend to plant at least six thousand trees as a source of income for the Mission. God may provide for their growth, for they will be planted for His greater glory.⁴⁸

A few months later, his Italian confrère Pier Luigi Consalvi positively stresses, in a personal letter to Oliva, Bettendorff's effort to improve the economic situation of the Mission by "planting cacao of which is made the beverage called *Chiccolata*".⁴⁹ Bettendorff's report also shows that he intended to cooperate, to a certain extent, with the settlers, as he considered cacao as a kind of solution for the general crisis that then affected not only the Portuguese

⁴⁶ N. Harwich, 'Le chocolat et son imaginaire, XVIème-XVIIIème siècles: le monde américain dans une tasse', *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas*, 32 (1995), pp.261-93; M. Norton, 'Tasting empire: chocolate and the European internalization of Mesoamerican aesthetics', *The American Historical Review*, 111:3 (2006), pp.660-91; Clarence-Smith (2000), pp.11-20; I. Fattacciu, 'Atlantic History and Spanish consumer goods in the 18th century: The assimilation of exotic drinks and the fragmentation of European identities', *Nouveaux mondes nouveaux* (2012), at www.nuevomundo.revues.org/63480.

⁴⁷ Letters of Bettendorff to Oliva, São Luís, 1671 (s.d.), Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), cod. Bras 27, fl. 2v; São Luís, 21/07/1671, cod. Bras 26, fl. 27r; São Luís, 15/01/1672, ARSI, cod. Bras 9, fl. 298r; São Luís, 20/09/1677, ARSI, cod. Bras 26, 43r-44v, fl. 43v; São Luís, 07/05/1678, ARSI, cod. Bras fl. 47r; São Luís, 1678 (s.d.), ARSI, cod. Bras 26, fl. 48v-49r.

⁴⁸ Letter of Bettendorff to Oliva, São Luís, 20/09/1677. ARSI, Rome, cod. Bras 26, fl. 43v.

⁴⁹ Letter of Consalvi to Oliva, São Luís, 27/02/1678. ARSI, cod. Bras 26, fl. 53v. More than forty years later, the Jesuit chronicler Domingos de Araújo remembers Bettendorff's effort in favour of economic consolidation of the mission work in the captaincy of Pará. See 'Chronica da Companhia de Jesus', 1720. Biblioteca Pública de Évora (BPE), cod. CXV/2-11, fl. 234v.

possessions in the Amazon region, but the entire colonial world.⁵⁰ According to another letter, the Jesuit from Luxembourg even succeeded in convincing Governor Inácio Coelho da Silva (1678-1682), responsible for the execution of the new royal initiatives for the Amazon region,⁵¹ to visit one of the new cacao plantation in Maranhão, pointing out the importance of the product for the increasing consumption of hot chocolate in Europe.⁵² Nevertheless, sources also indicate that at the end of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits' cacao production was not spared by the crisis. German-born Father Aloysius Konrad Pfeil alluded, in a letter from 1691, that the economic balance of the Mission was extremely unfavourable due to the decreasing amount of cacao beans and clove bark for exportation.⁵³

In 1701, an anonymous Jesuit document, written from the Maranhão Mission, denounces to church authorities in Rome the supposed greed of the settlers for spices and the abuse of the Indians as compulsory workers:

The main business in these Portuguese towns [Belém and São Luís] was to make, by all means, profit with the aromatic clove bark and with cacao, i.e., the famous and aromatic beans from which chocolate is made. A huge quantity of these commodities is extracted from the forests by Indian labourers and then sent to Portugal.⁵⁴

Between the lines, the report admits the importance of cacao and clove bark on European markets. By doing so, the author alludes to the harsh competition that existed between settlers and missionaries in producing and commercialising these two main Amazonian spices.

However, one cannot use the promising engagement of the missionaries and the expansion of their plantations as exemplary of the whole cacao exploitation system in the Portuguese Amazonian region, as already mentioned above. In fact, Jesuits had relatively free access to the labour force that lived in the many Indian villages they administered in the *sertões*, but also close to the main cities and forts of the region. In this context, Dauril Alden highlights that:

Orders working in the Amazon, produced some cacao on their own plantations, but they depended primarily upon their Amerindian neophytes and catechumens in the

⁵⁰ J.-F. Labourdette, *Histoire du Portugal*, Paris: Fayard, 2000, pp.344-422; F. Mauro, *Des produits et des hommes. Essais historiques latino-américains XVI^e-XX^e siècles*, Paris/The Hague: Mouton/École pratique des Hautes Études, 1972, p.80.

⁵¹ K. H. Arenz, *De l'Alzette à l'Amazone. Jean-Philippe Bettendorff et les jésuites en Amazonie portugaise (1661-1693)*, Saarbrücken: Éditions Universitaires Européennes, 2010, pp.54-5.

⁵² Letter from Bettendorff to Oliva, São Luís, 07/05/1678. ARSI, cod. Bras 26, fl. 47r. In this report, the Jesuit superior mentions again his effort to diffuse the cacao tree among the settlers : "In fact, three years ago, I commanded the planting of one thousand trees, which already are producing fruits, that I am distributing entirely among the inhabitants of the Maranhão Captaincy, so that they themselves may plant trees, for this is what the Honourable Governor [Inácio Coelho da Silva] asked me for, seeking to satisfy the wish of the Most Serene Prince [prince regent (1668-1683) and later king Pedro II (until 1706)]."

⁵³ Letter from Pfeil to Oliva, São Luís, 27/02/1691. ARSI, cod. Bras 26, fl. 366v.

⁵⁴ "Informatio de Maraõnensis Missionis Statu", 1701. Archivio Storico de Propaganda Fide (ASPF), cod. Scrittura riferite nei Congressi – America Meridionale, vol. 1, fl. 518r.

interior missions to collect it. Such reliance brought the fathers into direct conflict with vested settler interests.⁵⁵

As the priests had the workers, the tools and the expertise to fabricate canoes of various sizes, they were able to send expeditions to the *sertões* in search of more Indians and spices, cacao included. During these incursions, they could rely on the many Indian villages scattered in the hinterland, as well as on a number of indigenous groups already in contact with them. Besides this, the fathers received land grants not only from the Crown, but also from devout Portuguese settlers. Jesuits also systematically avoided paying tithes and were exempted of paying custom taxes, as mentioned above. As one can see, these were enough reasons for their secular businesses to prosper in the Amazon region, as indeed they did.⁵⁶

In 1704, the planters complained to the Crown that the fathers were allegedly too involved in cacao commerce, neglecting their spiritual obligations.⁵⁷ More than twenty years later, Paulo da Silva Nunes, an influential confidant of the Governor Bernardo Pereira de Berredo (1718-1722), publicly accused the Jesuits of being responsible for the systematic “ruin of the State [of Maranhão and Grão-Pará]” due to a deliberate exploitation of the indigenous labour force and the region’s natural potentialities.⁵⁸ The successor of Berredo, Jesuit friendly Governor João da Maia da Gama (1722-1728) responded that the fathers “are producing more cacao, because they have more Indians to work, and this, within a well-planned system [of missions]”⁵⁹.

The controversies, however, did not affect ongoing Jesuit investment in cacao. Looking at the exports transacted by the religious orders in the Amazonian colony, between 1743 and 1745, four-fifths were undertaken by the Society of Jesus. Within these transactions, according to Martine Droulers, cacao was, by far, the most important product, with 78.7 percent, followed by clove bark with 16.1 percent, sugar with 2.7 percent, sarsaparilla with 2.1 percent and, finally coffee with just 0.4 percent.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, despite these impressive numbers, one cannot state that the Jesuit cacao activities flourished to the detriment of those of the settlers, as the latter wanted the royal authorities in Lisbon to believe. Fortunately, at the time of their expulsion from the region, in the late 1750s, the Jesuits themselves prepared a detailed inventory of their lands, goods and slaves. Only in the captaincy of Pará, they possessed many estates, besides considerable ranches of cattle on the island of Marajó.⁶¹ In four of them, they had *cacauais*.

⁵⁵ Alden (1996), p.546.

⁵⁶ D. Alden, ‘Aspectos econômicos da expulsão dos jesuítas do Brasil’, in H. H. Keith and S. F. Edwards (eds), *Conflito e continuidade na sociedade brasileira*, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1970, pp.31-78; P. Assunção, *Negócios jesuíticos: o cotidiano da administração dos bens divinos*, São Paulo: EdUSP, 2004; Neves Neto (2013).

⁵⁷ Alden (1996), p.546.

⁵⁸ AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 1645; AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 1628.

⁵⁹ Parecer de João da Maia da Gama, governador que foi do Maranhão, sobre os Requerimentos que a El-Rei representou, Paulo da Silva Nunes contra os missionários. Lisboa Ocidental, 22 de fevereiro, 1730 (A. J. de M. Moraes, *Chorografia histórica, chronográfica, genealógica, nobiliária e política do Império do Brasil*, Vol.4, Rio de Janeiro: Tipografia Americana, 1858, pp.260-61).

⁶⁰ M. Droulers, *Brésil : une géohistoire*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001, pp.102-3.

⁶¹ Concerning the history of the acquisition of these lands, see Neves Neto (2013), pp.46-67.

Two decades earlier, a tenacious foe of the Jesuits, Governor Alexandre de Sousa Freire (1728-1732), had organised a list of the priests' estates and production.⁶² Although this list was prepared well before the inventory made by the clerics, more than two decades earlier, it can give an idea of Jesuit production from the point of view of a colonial authority. Sousa Freire certainly exaggerated the ecclesiastics' economic output trying – unlike his already mentioned immediate predecessor João da Maia da Gama – to prove to the Crown how the Jesuits ruined the Royal Treasury by systematically avoiding the payment of tithes. The data of both reports are juxtaposed in Table 4.

Table 4 – Jesuits' estates and production

Source: AHU, Pará-Avulsos, doc. 1223; ARSI, Bras. 28, fls. 11-11v; 12; 13-14v; 17

Estate or "fazenda"	Alexandre de Sousa Freire (1728-32)	Jesuit inventory (late 1750s)
Gibirié	100 labourers (<i>pessoas de serviço</i>)	10 "negroes"
	a factory of canoes	a factory of canoes
	100 <i>arrobas</i> /year of cacao	two "cacauais"
	a factory of clapboards	two coffee plantations
	a smithy	manioc, maize and rice
	looms	
Ibirajuba	300 slaves ("negroes, <i>cafusos</i> ⁶³ , mulattoes and Indians") many free Indians from the Indian villages	102 slaves (34 under 10 years old)
	a sugar mill	a sugar mil
	a large factory of canoes	a factory of canoes
	alembics	alembics
		a pottery workshop
		cattle
		sugar plantation
		coffee and fruit trees
	five "cacauais"	
Jaguarari		81 slaves, including children; "negroes" and <i>cafusos</i> are designated as such
	alembics	an alembic
	a pottery workshop	a pottery workshop
	maize and beans	manioc

⁶² Concerning the conflicts between the clerics and the governor, see F. V. Santos, 'Pedras do ofício: Alexandre de Sousa Freire e os jesuítas no Estado do Maranhão (1728/1732)', *Anais da XXV Reunião da Sociedade Brasileira de Pesquisa Histórica*, Rio de Janeiro: SBPH, 2005, pp.275-82.

⁶³ Persons of mixed African and Indian descent.

	200 arrobas/year of cacao	two “cacauais”
	a factory of canoes	
	cotton	
	a factory of clapboards	
Taboatinga	not registered	14 black slaves, and 4 children
		an old “cacauais”
		Manioc
		a plantation of coffee
		a plantation of tobacco
		a pottery workshop
		an oven to toast manioc flour
		a loom
		a lathe
	some cattle	
Mutuacá	many Indians from the villages of free Indians	not registered
	200 arrobas/year of cacao	
Indian villages from where cacao was gathered in the <i>sertões</i>	Mortigura and Sumauma – 400 arrobas/year	not registered
	Bocas – 700 arrobas/year	
	Guaricuru – 500 arrobas/year	
	Arucará – 700 arrobas/year	
	Itacuruçá – 600 arrobas/year	
	Aricará – 400 arrobas/year	
	Tapajós – 400 arrobas/year	
	Arapiuns – 300 arrobas/year	
	Tupinambaranas – 300 arrobas/year	
Abacaxis – 1200 arrobas/year		

As one can see, data are far from following any pattern. Only the information about the factories and machinery seems to be comparable. One has to consider data produced by Governor Sousa Freire very cautiously, since he was – as we said – a declared and persistent opponent of the priests of the Society of Jesus.⁶⁴ In his inventory, he clearly advocates in favour of the friars of the Order of Our Lady of Mercy and the Franciscans of the Province of Saint Anthony, characterised as poor and attentive to the settlers’ and Crown’s needs. In addition to the many slaves noted for each Jesuit estate, Governor Sousa Freire stressed that “all the

⁶⁴ Jesuits had to face constant opposition and animosity from settlers and authorities. For a general approach on these issues in the Portuguese empire, see: Alden (1996), J. E. Franco, *Le Mythe Jésuite au Portugal, au Brésil, en Orient et en Europe*, Paris/Lisbon/São Paulo: Arkê, 2008. Concerning the more specific Amazonian context, see: Alden (1970); Santos (2005); K. H. Arenz, and R. L. Carvalho, ‘Jesuítas e colonos na Amazônia portuguesa: contendas e compromissos (sécs. XVII e XVIII)’, *Revista de Estudos de Cultura*, 5 (2016), pp.19-34.

[missionaries'] lands here declared are cultivated by Indians, both male and female, from the villages [*aldeias*] that the same priests administer". Even if one has to take this statement carefully, it indicates how both free and slave Indian labour were crucial for the development of the cacao industry in the colonial Portuguese Amazon.

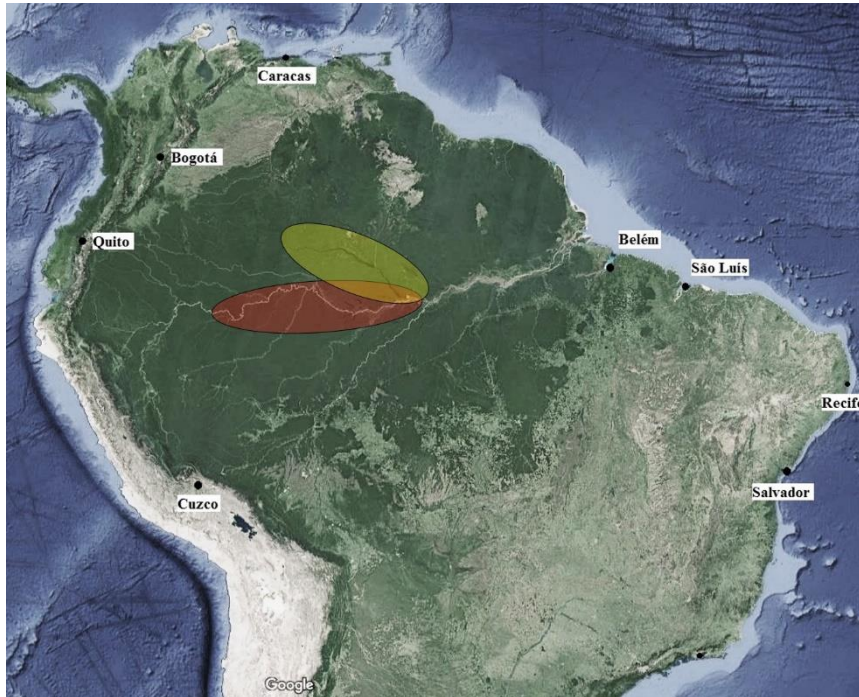


Figure 4 – The Negro (in yellow) and Solimões or Amazon (in red) river frontiers

Although we may not trust Sousa Freire's numbers, they nevertheless seem to confirm a shift in cacao production. After the mid-1720s, production possibly concentrated on the gathering of cacao in the hinterland, which was mainly made possible by the opening and the steady advance of the far western frontier, especially in the Negro River, but also in the Solimões River, after a series of wars against Indian populations and disputes with Spanish missionaries.⁶⁵ This constant westward expansion opened rather remote *sertões* to numerous journeys in search of spices and slaves (Figure 4).

In this context, it is important to note that Sousa Freire mentions in his report the Carmelites in their role as administrators of eleven *aldeias* that produced a total amount of 3,800 *arrobas* of cacao, besides two estates providing 400 *arrobas* of cultivated cacao each in the environs of the city of Belém. In fact, these friars were, from the end of the seventeenth century, responsible for the Indian villages in the far west, more precisely those in the strategic valleys of the Negro and Solimões (or Amazon) Rivers.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Sweet 1974, pp.465-625; Dias (2014a), pp.58-62; Dias (2014b), pp.232-47; Carvalho Jr (2015), pp.69-90.

⁶⁶ Sweet (1974), pp.626-80; Carvalho Jr (2015).

Conclusion

Throughout the second half of the seventeenth and the first of the eighteenth century, canoes sent to the *sertão* arrived at Belém full of cacao and other spices. But they brought Indian slaves, too, who had to work in the settlers' and clerics' estates, producing food crops and cacao. A considerable number of these Indians was sent back again to the *sertão*, as an integral part of legal and illegal incursions, in search of more cacao, spices and slaves. The systematic 'opening' of the western hinterland from the 1720s, which coincided with epidemics of smallpox, encouraged the expansion of the exploitation of cacao and the search for slaves in those *sertões*.

Thus if, as Dauril Alden points out, there was an international conjuncture that instigated a cacao boom from the 1720s onwards,⁶⁷ this process was closely linked to the internal dynamics of colonial Amazonian society, moulded during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This process was profoundly marked by some fundamental factors, such as the *sertões* and the progressive expansion through the hinterland (mainly following the region's complex, but strategic, waterway network), by the Indian labour force, by an economy based on both agriculture and the gathering of forest products, and by a still undelimited frontier and the necessity of its occupation.

The peculiarity of the space and the diversity of people living and acting in it have to be taken into account to understand the 'economy' of the *sertões* and how it was connected to the mercantilist economy. In fact, cacao and the other spices – gathered or cultivated – literally helped to shape the Amazon region. Nevertheless, using Fernand Braudel's words, there remains a "zone d'opacité",⁶⁸ which, *de facto*, is a world of changeable relationships, reconfigurable exchanges and constant negotiations. These rather unforeseeable and complex dynamics generally occurred in the deep hinterland, not directly dictated by the logic of capitalist principles. In fact, in the remote *sertão*, traditional exchange networks, practices and beliefs – some of them established well before the arrival of the Europeans – are essential to understand how the Amazonian commodities were exploited.

⁶⁷ Alden (1976), p.113.

⁶⁸ F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, Vol.1, Paris: Armand Collin, 1979, p.8.

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The mutually reinforcing relationship between 'commodities' and 'empires' has long been recognised. Over the last six centuries the quest for profits has driven imperial expansion, with the global trade in commodities fuelling the ongoing industrial revolution. These 'commodities of empire', which became transnationally mobilised in ever larger quantities, included foodstuffs (wheat, rice, bananas); industrial crops (cotton, rubber, linseed and palm oils); stimulants (sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and opium); and ores (tin, copper, gold, diamonds). Their expanded production and global movements brought vast spatial, social, economic and cultural changes to both metropolises and colonies.

In the Commodities of Empire project we explore the networks through which such commodities circulated within, and in the spaces between, empires. We are particularly attentive to local processes – originating in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America – which significantly influenced the outcome of the encounter between the world economy and regional societies, doing so through a comparative approach that explores the experiences of peoples subjected to different imperial hegemonies.

The following key research questions inform the work of project:

- 1) The networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires;
- 2) The interlinking 'systems' (political-military, agricultural labour, commercial, maritime, industrial production, social communication, technological knowledge) that were themselves evolving during the colonial period, and through which these commodity networks functioned;
- 3) The impact of agents in the periphery on the establishment and development of commodity networks: as instigators and promoters; through their social, cultural and technological resistance; or through the production of anti-commodities;
- 4) The impact of commodity circulation both on the periphery, and on the economic, social and cultural life of the metropolises;
- 5) The interrogation of the concept of 'globalisation' through the study of the historical movement and impact of commodities.

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