



# Moundbuilders of the Amazon: Geophysical Archaeology on Marajo Island, Brazil

*Anna Curtenius Roosevelt*

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Moundbuilders of the Amazon shows that sophisticated archaeological, bioarchaeological, and geophysical techniques of remote sensing are fully applicable to tropical sites. Additionally, the comprehensive use of such techniques by all archaeologists, doing fieldwork anywhere, could revolutionize archaeology, allowing archaeologists to look inside sites rather than simply excavate them.\*\*Using a variety of remote sensing techniques, Roosevelt documents the existence of a major moundbuilding culture possessing monumental architecture and a rich artistic tradition on the lowland tropical floodplain of Marajo Island at the mouth of the Amazon River in Brazil, from about 400 A. D. to about 1,300 A. D.\*\*Marajo Island at the mouth of the Amazon River is about the same size as Switzerland or Belgium. A well developed civilization existed there from about 400 A. D. to 1,300 A. D., comparable in many ways to the Inca civilization to the west or to the Aztec and Maya cultures to the north or, in some interesting ways, to the Pharonic cultures which developed at the mouth of the Nile. Because this civilization had no stone at its disposal, it expressed its monumental architecture in packed dirt which washed back into the alluvial floodplain long ago, effectively preventing archaeological discovery until the recent development of sophisticated techniques of remote sensing and reconstruction.

## Key Features

- \* Reports on the most extensive stratigraphic excavations ever of an ancient Amazonian civilization adapted to a floodplain environment
- \* Introduces the first use of geophysics for archaeology in non-specialized language
- \* Illustrates, for the first time, the elaborate art of a complex society that was indigenous to the tropical lowlands
- \* Describes monumental sites, rich polychrome pottery, and the first extensive biological remains ever recovered in an Amazonian site
- \* Proves that sophisticated archaeological, bioarchaeological, and geophysical techniques of remote sensing are fully applicable to tropical sites
- \* Shows that the comprehensive use of such methods could revolutionize archaeology by allowing archaeologists to look inside sites rather than simply excavate them
- \* Provides examples which prove that the theories about the limitations of the tropical environment for cultural evolution are simply untrue and were based on faulty knowledge of the region and its archaeology

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