



Preface

The idea for the volume first came about through a conversation the editors had at the Sustainable Management of Soil Organic Matter Conference in Edinburgh in September 1999. It developed with two symposia on Amazonian dark earths that were held in 2001 in conjunction with the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers in Benicassim, Spain, and the Congress of the Brazilian Archaeological Society in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, respectively, and culminated at the First International Workshop on Terra Preta Soils held in Manaus and Santarém, Brazil, in July 2002. As a comprehensive treatment of these distinctive anthropogenic soils has never been published, we decided to select papers from these symposia and develop an edited volume. The result contains the efforts of an international group of distinguished scholars from the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, biology, geography, and soil science. The 15 chapters of this volume provide an array of interesting and complementary interpretative stances developed from a diverse body of investigative methodologies. The reader will note that there are some inconsistencies in terminology and differences in interpretation among the chapter presentations. However, the editors purposely allowed these to remain and retained as much as possible of the authors' own words, since we felt that it was important to maintain the flavor of the symposium atmosphere in this volume and consequently did not intentionally force standardization upon the authors.

Interest among scholars from a variety of disciplines on the topic of the dark earths has recently been enhanced by articles in many journals, including *Science* and *Naturwissenschaften*. The public has also been informed through a noteworthy exhibition at the British Museum entitled "The Unknown Amazon" in which the significance of the dark earths was emphasized and recent articles in such popular magazines as *Der Spiegel* and *The Atlantic Monthly* (both in March 2002 issues) and in many newspaper pieces and online notices and commentary. During the 2002 Manaus workshop and field conference, a documentary with special emphasis on Amazonian dark earths was filmed and subsequently broadcast that December on BBC 2. Additional programs have appeared on German television more recently. The issues posed by the dark earth soils from the past potentially provide a rich resource for the future of Amazonia and, indeed, the world. It is our hope that this volume will help the reader attain a better understanding of these soils and the efforts toward resolving the basic questions of their past, present, and future.

The editors thank all the participants of the three symposia for their invaluable contributions toward Amazonian dark earth research. These individuals provided both individually and collectively the true spirit of shared scholarship that makes these investigations such a joy to be a part of.

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