

The Significance of Emerging Research on Amazonian Dark Earth Soils for Africa?

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During the last 20 years, research on Amazonian soils has been central to a revolutionary reappraisal of the region's social and natural history. Patches of a dark and highly fertile soils (*Terra Preta* and *Terra Mulata*) have been found to occur throughout Amazonia, covering perhaps 10% of its land area. The former are the legacy of the settlement sites (middens) of pre-Colombian farmers, and the latter a result of their agricultural practices. The ability of these soils to support intensive agriculture has undermined environmentally determinist views of Amazonian history which until recently asserted that the inherently infertile soils could not support populous settled farming. Curiously, however, this excitement has been confined to Amazonia and its specialists. This paper outlines preliminary evidence to suggest that similar anthropogenic soils might exist in West Africa.