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## Amazon Sweet Sea: Land, Life, and Water at the River's Mouth

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others are not quite as convincing in positioning some elements as central to indigenous peoples' traditions in their present territorial or other political struggles. Furthermore, it should be noted that the articles are predominantly from northeastern Amazonia, including the Guiana Shield and Orinoco drainage areas, and that they do not cover other parts of the Amazonia. Despite these limitations, the volume raises important questions for future research in anthropology. I recommend this work to scholars interested in theoretical issues surrounding the production of indigenous histories and historicities, geography and power relations, as well as in methodological and theoretical questions in anthropology.

*Amazon Sweet Sea: Land, Life, and Water at the River's Mouth.* Nigel J.H. Smith. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002. xii + 296 pp., plates, map, notes, appendix, bibliography, index. \$39.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-292-77770-1. [[www.utexas.edu/utpress](http://www.utexas.edu/utpress)]

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Nigel Smith has produced a beautifully illustrated volume on the practicalities of natural resource management around the mouth of the Amazon, with a particular focus on Marajó Island. In ten chapters he provides detailed accounts of how rural people in this area use various kinds of little-known fruits, nuts, wood, fish, and game. In part because it is filled with anecdotes and lore, this catalogue of resources is accessible and enjoyable reading. It is a storehouse of rare and sometimes vanishing information on the ethnobiology and technology of the Amazon estuary, much of which has its roots in indigenous cultures that are no longer intact. Most of the text deals with very concrete matters regarding the physical appearance and occurrence of various species, harvesting techniques, transport, storage, and consumption, but there are also sections discussing general issues such as urban markets, globalization, and sustainability. The text often seems second in importance to the many photographs, most of which portray smiling youngsters posing with some exotic grocery or artefact.

The first two chapters briefly present the physical geography and economic history of the Amazon estuary, from its tectonic formation eight million years ago to the collapse of the rubber boom and its aftermath in the twentieth century. The following seven chapters deal, respectively, with livestock ranching, several useful species of palm trees, wild fruits, agriculture, logging, fishing, and hunting. The tenth and final chapter briefly discusses the threats and possibilities of economic globalization, mentioning timber extraction as the most recent boom-and-bust cycle in Amazonia, opportunities for ecotourism,

debt-for-nature swaps, soybean cultivation, and the consequences of a possible future rise in sea due to global warming.

Anthropologists will be primarily interested in the brief sections dealing with how indigenous peoples have transformed the tropical landscape over the millennia. Smith shows the extent to which nature and culture are interwoven, but also how more tangible traces of past cultures, such as thousand-year-old Marajoara earthworks and funerary urns (occasionally used today for storing water), are integrated into modern rural life. As Smith's interests are primarily geographical, however, there is very little mention of indigenous ethnic groups and cultural variation within the region.

Some readers will be surprised to find Smith arguing that technological change, urban growth, and market integration in this part of Amazonia have helped to save the forests from destruction. This generally optimistic outlook overshadows his briefly mentioned concerns over expanding pasture, removal of mangroves, and global warming. Smith visualizes "sustainable" management of Amazonian forests by the middle of this century and welcomes intensification of "green" (entirely range-based) cattle raising as a means of alleviating pressure on forests. He also suggests that soybean cultivation will slow the rate of deforestation in Amazonia, rather than accelerate it. In any case, he argues, soybeans are unlikely to displace the cattle and water buffalo of Marajó.

The main merit of this book is neither its treatment of indigenous cultural traditions nor its reflections on economic development in Amazonia, both of which are in fact quite cursory. Rather, its strength lies in the very detailed way in which everyday existence in the estuary is brought to life through systematic observations and photographs from the field. It is an invaluable documentation of the material culture, practices, and preferences of a rural population whose circumstances are likely to undergo rapid change over the next few decades.