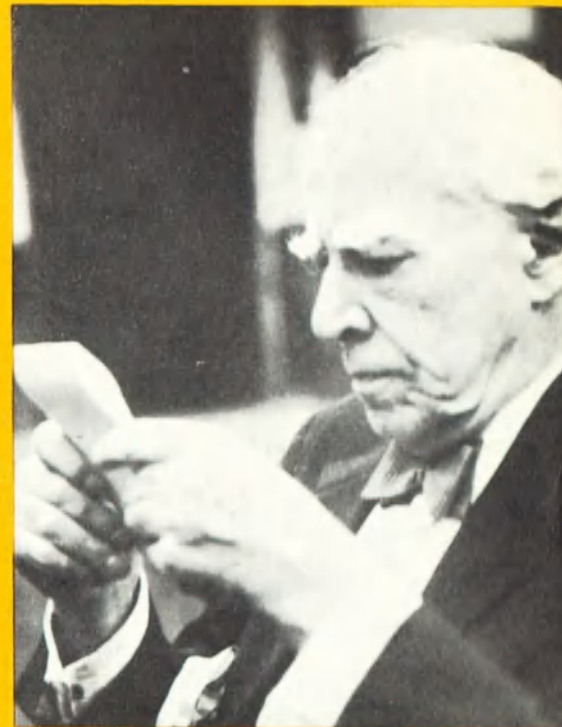
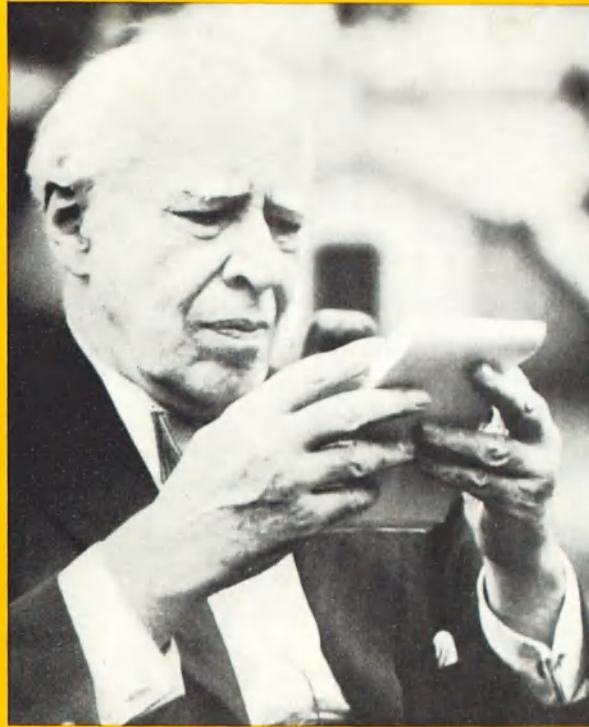




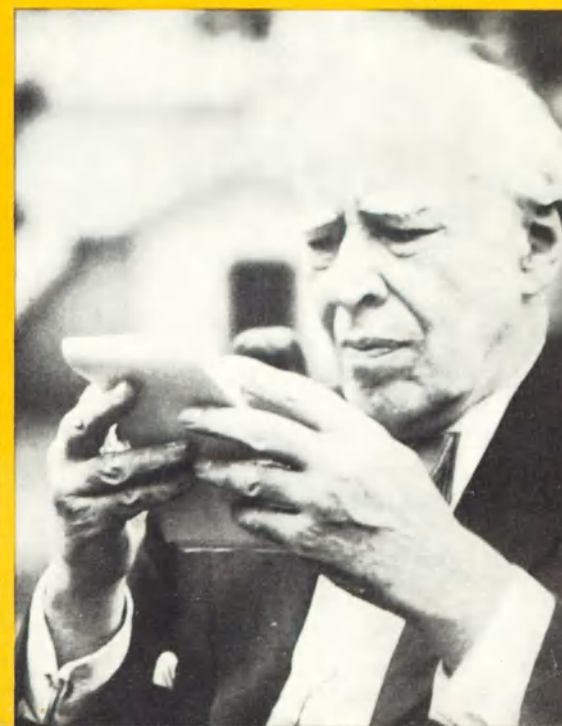
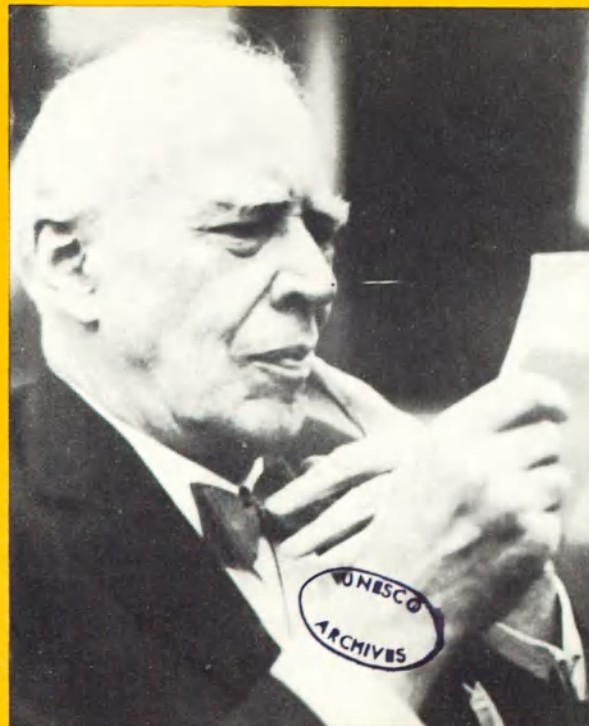
A WINDOW OPEN ON THE WORLD

# Courier

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**Constantin Stanislavsky**  
**THE MAN**  
**WHO REVOLUTIONIZED**  
**THE THEATRE**



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No. 11

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**C O V E R   P H O T O**

This year marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Russian actor and stage producer, Constantin Stanislavsky. An inspired and meticulous artist for whom no effort was too great, he gave a completely new form to dramatic art. A quarter of a century after his death the impact of his work continues to be felt in all parts of the world. (See page 12)

Official Soviet photo

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**Editorial Offices**  
Unesco, Place de Fontenoy, Paris 7\*, France

**Editor-in-Chief**  
Sandy Koffler

**Assistant Editor**  
René Caloz

**Associate Editors**

English Edition : Ronald Fenton

French Edition : Jane Albert Hesse

Spanish Edition : Arturo Despouey

Russian Edition : Veniamin Matchavariani (Moscow)

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**Layout & Design**  
Robert Jacquemin

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*All correspondence should be addressed to the Editor-in-Chief.*



**A**MONG the many civilizations whose remains are scattered through the New World few have so intrigued archaeologists as that which once flourished on the island of Marajo at the mouth of the Amazon. We do not know who were its artisans; it was the work of men who had vanished before Europeans landed on the coast of Brazil.

The existence of this centre of civilization in so unexpected a place had already inspired the most venturesome theories in the 19th century. What, indeed, has not been written on the subject? Egyptians, Phoenicians and even Vikings were all named in turn to explain the contrast between these remains of a people which had reached a relatively advanced level of civilization and the wretchedness of the local physical and human environment. There was something paradoxical in the fact that an art which was both original and refined should be found in a part of the continent which one might imagine had always been the stronghold of barbaric tribes.

Moreover, there was nothing about this alluvial land below the Equator to favour its development as an artistic centre. Depending on the season, the large island is turned into lakes and swamps or into dusty plains. When the streams are in spate, natural or artificial hills emerge here and there from the water and provide a refuge for men and animals. These are conditions barely suited to primitive groups engaged in rudimentary farming combined with fishing and hunting. Such, indeed, was the way of life of the tribes which the Portuguese found there in the 17th century and which they promptly set about exterminating.

Yet part of the island was once occupied by a sedentary people who knew how to make the best use of their land. Their villages were built on slopes which today are littered with shards of pottery. Their burial-grounds are also filled with pottery fragments and objects made of clay, and from these we have able to reconstruct in part the culture of a people whose very name is unknown.

The "Marajoaras," as we may call them for con-



Musée de l'Homme, Paris

venience, certainly possessed relatively complex social and political structures: the works they carried out mark them as a disciplined people governed by chiefs or by an aristocracy. It would be difficult to explain how they built artificial hills 25 feet high, some 400 feet long and 130 feet wide unless there were some common determination and leadership. Isolated communities like those of the present-day Indians could never have achieved such a feat. That the ancient Marajo society had a hierarchic character may be inferred from the lavishness of certain tombs which archaeologists have uncovered in the burial-grounds side-by-side with more modest graves.

The island of Marajo contains only a small quantity of



An island as large as Denmark, Marajo stands between the Amazon and Para rivers, almost touching the Equator. One of the most important regions for cattle raising in all northern Brazil, its herds number well over 600,000 head. Its ranchers are skilled riders, using horses and also the saddle oxen (left) which offer greater security as mounts in periods of heavy rains that transform the flat countryside into lakes and swamps. The Marajo cowboy rides barefoot and, only placing his big toe in the stirrup can dismount with speed and agility.

© Marcel Gautherot,  
Rio de Janeiro

# THE UNSOLVED MYSTERY OF MARAJO

by Alfred Métraux

rock. Thus, ceramics are almost the sole relics left by this mysterious people. Like the Sumerians and the Babylonians, they delighted in making clay versions of many objects whose prototypes were normally fashioned of some other material. For example, terra cotta cylinders seem to have been used as ornaments for the lips and ears. Terra cotta seats have been found which are identical in form with those which the Indians carve from wooden logs. Finally, excavations have turned up great numbers of triangular plates, slightly convex and perforated at the ends. Their shape, the signs of wear they show and their proximity to female skeletons have led to their being identified as a *tanga*, or slip. They bear some resemblance to those triangular pieces of bark which are the sole garment worn by the women of certain tribes of the Amazon.

All we know of the religious beliefs of this people are their funeral rites. They either cremated the dead or preserved their bones in urns. Statuettes of crouching women have been found in the tombs and may have some ritual significance. The style of Marajo pottery is essentially geometric and is also distinguished by the use of various decorative techniques—modelling, Champlevé enamel and painting. Certain vases are decorated with reliefs showing men and animals. There are burial urns on which paintings and reliefs embody the rough image of human beings whose eyes are often marked with an oblique stroke which gives a sad expression to the face as though the artist had sought to suggest mourning and

grief. Only actual illustrations give a proper idea of the richness and varied arrangements of the motifs they used.

What is known of the origins of this civilization? Scholars have sought in vain for any reference to this mysterious people in the old chronicles and documents dealing with the exploration and conquest of the Amazon. None of them has anything to say on the subject. The mystery would therefore have remained absolute had it not been for the work of two American ethnographers, Clifford Evans and Betty Meggers.

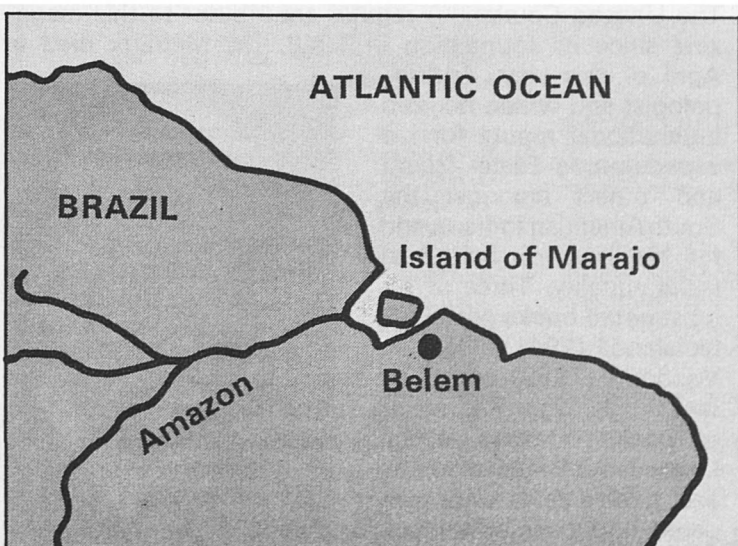
Despite all the obstacles with which the bush and the swamps confronted them, they carried out a series of excavations in the island of Marajo. They were able to establish that the civilization of the "Marajoaras" had been preceded by three other archaeological phases of a much more primitive kind, the first comprising a people of hunters and fishermen. There is no link whatever between these ancient phases (which in many respects are little different from those of today's Amazon Indians) and the most culturally advanced one.

**O**NE day, which the two archaeologists place in the XIIIth century, a mysterious people emerged at the mouth of the Amazon, bringing with them an artistic tradition which was already fully formed. The invaders established themselves in the plains of the large island and lived in villages built on the heights of artificial hills.

Far from prospering in their new home, they gradually declined. The pottery on the most recent sites is less finished and less beautiful than in the older deposits. The objects connected with burials grow poorer and more uniform, which suggests that with the general decadence there came a levelling out of the social classes.

Finally, at a period which was probably not long before the discovery of America, the Marajo civilization came to an end as if those who had created it were no longer capable of preserving it. The people seem to have succumbed to forces the nature of which is still wrapped in mystery, since excavations have revealed no trace whatever of wars or invasions.

The Marajo civilization is therefore a late one. It was introduced already formed by emigrants who, cut off from their original home, were unable to develop or even to preserve it. Once these facts were established it then remained to discover the birthplace of the unknown people who settled on the edge of the Atlantic.



CONT'D ON NEXT PAGE

# 3000-mile migration along the Amazon

Comparative studies which it would take too long to describe here convinced Evans and Meggers that their research should be directed towards the Andean region and more especially in Colombia. Scattered finds along the Amazon seemed to mark the route followed by the "Marajoaras" and it was in the hope of finding fresh traces of this migration that they recently carried out excavations on the banks of the Rio Napo, one of the tributaries of the Amazon, which has always been a means of access from the Andes to the Amazonas.

**T**HE eleven archæological sites which they explored fully confirmed the theory which had led them there. The ancestors of the "Marajo people" had travelled down the Napo and had stayed there for sometime. The pottery which was discovered there was frequently identical with that of the Marajo. The Napo had therefore been one of the stages in the migration which started in Colombia and ended at the mouth of the Amazon, some 3,000 miles further on.

The unknown tribe which crossed the continent did so relatively quickly for the layer of archæological deposits of the Napo is not particularly thick and corresponds to a relatively short occupation. It is probable that the bearers of the new civilization also stopped during their journey on the Middle Amazon since pottery was discovered in the Manaos area which in shape and ornamentation resembled both Napo and Marajo pottery.

But the actual birthplace of Marajo civilization which must lie somewhere in Colombia has not yet been discovered. Similarities between various Colombian cultures and those of the Amazon have been recognized but the

Ceramics, like the pottery vessels shown here (above and below), are almost the only relics left by a mysterious people who once lived on the island of Marajo. Their pottery bears geometric designs and is richly decorated with modelling, enamel work and painting.

Musée de l'Homme. Paris



archæologists have not so far been able to identify the area where those elements typical of the Marajo civilization might have originated. In archæological terms, Colombia still happens to be a little-known country.

According to Evans and Meggers, the decline and then the disappearance of the Marajo civilization was solely due to economic causes. Like all the tropical tribes, the Marajoaras practised shifting cultivation on burnt-out land with the result that the soil was exhausted within a few centuries. The time eventually came when the Marajo people were no longer able to produce enough food for their fairly dense population. With the decline in numbers, the specialized craftsmanship which had encouraged the development of pottery and other industries could no longer survive. The fate of the Marajo people is somewhat similar to that of the Maya empire which likewise came to a sudden end. Today, the economic explanation of the death of tropical civilizations is contested. Hence the problem is far from resolved and we are forced to admit that without that explanation the mystery remains intact.

This is one of the last articles that Dr. Alfred Métraux sent to The Unesco Courier. A regular contributor to this magazine since its foundation in 1948, Dr. Métraux died in April of this year. Anthropologist and writer, he won international repute for his expedition to Easter Island and others amongst the South American Indians, and for his work on behalf of racial equality. Three of his most noted books are "Easter Island" (1941); "Haitian Voodoo" (1959) and "The Incas" (1962). The series of books on race which Unesco published over the past twelve years were prepared under his editorship.

