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Tracing traces from present to past : a functional analysis of pre-Columbian shell and stone artefacts from Anse à la Gourde and Morel, Guadeloupe, FWI
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Preface

The every-day life of prehistoric people has been my main fascination since my first visit to the Historical Archaeological Research Centre in Lejre, Denmark in 1980. During my studies this interest concentrated around the possibilities of functional analysis to reconstruct domestic activities. As a student-assistant at what used to be called the 'Lithic Lab' I examined flint tools for traces of wear and helped with extending the experimental reference collection. In 1997 and 1998 two late Mesolithic wetland sites were excavated near Rotterdam (Louwe Kooijmans (ed.) 2001a, 2001b). Organic preservation was excellent here and bone and antler tools were perfectly preserved. It was thus possible to perform a functional analysis not only of the flint and hard stone tools (Van Gijn *et al.* 2001; Van Gijn and Houkes 2001) but also of tools made of bone, antler and teeth (Oversteegen *et al.* 2001). This permitted us to study the technological and functional relationships between different categories of artefacts, hereby tracing the technological choices made by past tool makers and users. I took part in this research as a junior-specialist. This 'integral' approach towards tool use was given an Aspasia-grant by the Dutch Organisation for Scientific Research in 2000: The usewear analysis of prehistoric artefacts: an integral approach towards the study of material culture (NWO-ASPASIA-programme 015.000.095), directed by Dr A. L. van Gijn, Faculty of Archaeology, Leiden University. Just before that, the Caribbean section of the faculty was conducting a large-scale excavation at two sites on Guadeloupe, in cooperation with the DRAC-Guadeloupe under supervision of André Delpuech, Corinne Hofman and Menno Hoogland. The present study was part of this research, and is now incorporated into the Aspasia-programme because the excavations provided an overview of a toolkit consisting of implements made of flint, stone, shell and coral. Although I was specialized in European prehistory, the possibilities of the combination of experimental archaeology, ethno-archaeology and functional analysis especially captivated me. In this framework, the present study was undertaken.

