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Summary

This thesis is a contribution to the conceptualisation of mobility on a micro-level for Caribbean and Amazonian archaeology. In the greater part of the 20th century, archaeologists of these regions had to base their interpretations on data extracted from a small number of archaeological excavations, which did not allow them to speculate further than crude and homogenous archaeological cultures, the changes in which were predominantly ascribed to large migrations. Due to the progress made in fine tuning archaeological methodologies in the beginning of the 21st century, the archaeology of these regions has benefitted from new high resolution data which, in turn, requires different lines of interpretation. As regards the topic of mobility, the theoretical frame of interpretation has shifted over the years from a focus on migrations by large population groups, to a more complex history of movements by smaller groups of people. Since it is now possible to trace the individual trajectories of both people and goods, a demand has arisen for conceptual tools to interpret these micro-level movements.

In this study, the assumption is made that one needs to perceive matter in action to conceptualize it. In order to understand mobility and movement, also from an archaeological point of view, one first needs to observe it. Archaeology, however, appears to be the antonym of ‘movement’. Everything archaeologists unearth is ‘dead’ in the sense of no longer moving. Therefore archaeologists normally rely heavily on socio-cultural anthropological theories and concepts for their interpretations. Decades ago the interests of socio-cultural anthropology were largely in sync with archaeology, but today these are often too un-situated (multi-site, non-material and abstract) and simply not designed to meet archaeological needs. The discipline of archaeology operates in a different epistemic domain, in which the default is working with extremely fragmented data and in which interpretations are all inferences by definition. In order to theorize in archaeology, therefore, it is argued here that archaeologists need to observe actions in the present themselves.

In the empirical part of this study, ‘restrictive’ archaeological parameters were adopted to conceptualize contemporary mobility. This means that, first of all, the same unit of observation was applied, namely, the empirical focus was set on one single village: the Trio village of Amotopo in Midwest Suriname. Subsequently the mobility of the village came to be perceived as the movements of matter in and out of the village, making and shaping the village in the process. As the movements of both people and objects can be traced in contemporary archaeology, both moving people and objects were labelled *mobilia*. The objects that stopped moving in
the village, or which left irreversible traces in the soil, were termed *immobilia*. One can think here of rubbish being tossed away, but also posts and hearths of present-day houses. Seen from an archaeological perspective, an immobilisation process could be witnessed in which *mobilia*, brought to the village, were either perpetuated to other villages or would find their final destiny within the boundaries of the village. Based on the *immobilia* of the village, three spheres of movement were postulated: a sphere of subsistence *mobilia* (procurement of crops, firewood, fish and game), a sphere of exchange *mobilia* (perishable and durable objects) and a sphere of residential *mobilia* (hearts, posts and stakes) each representing different types of movement occurring in different spaces and temporalities.

Combining Amotopoan interest in their history, with my own in the history of their archaeological movements, I began to trace the movements of the Amotopoans and those of their ancestors in a timeframe of up to a century (2008-1907). The period of a century has been divided up into three periods, each revolving around a specific village of one of the Amotopoan ancestors. Subsequently, the three villages have been compared with one another in terms of their different characteristics as regards their earlier defined spheres of *mobilia*. The direction adopted was counter-chronological – following the asymmetry of perception. This means that the closer to one’s own observation, the more justified knowledge is, while the further away from it, the more speculative it becomes. That said, the contrasts the villages from the past provide serve also to highlight the unique characteristics of the present village. One example of this is that the present day village, Amotopo, through these very contrasts, is characterised by a large number of exchange *mobilia* (the new accumulation of plastic and metal objects) and residential *mobilia* (separate domestic cooking and storage structures), the hypothetical remains of which would normally be accredited to a larger number of people in archaeological reconstructions than the extended family that actually inhabits Amotopo.

Taking these three periods together, a century of Trio movements can be interpolated, which teach us of the dynamics that unfold in such a short period of time. This period of a hundred years, chosen here because of the individuals that could be traced in the historical sources, can at the same time considered to be the blind spot in contemporary archaeology. This is because the present-day dating (predominantly radiocarbon) does not yet enable us to establish the contemporaneity of actions and interactions between sites within this time frame. Hopefully new methodologies and future research will provide the means to grasp the contemporaneity or sequentiality of archaeological sites in the same region, a practice that is presently – inevitably – based more on speculative assumption than on fact. That said, Amotopo shows clearly the differences between how present-day Trio live now, compared with how they used to live. It shows
that we need both present and past case studies to elucidate the differences. Therefore, above all, this study of the Amotoapoan village should be seen as a specific, recent archaeology of the Surinamese-Trio. Documented in archaeological detail, this book will also provide a platform for contrast with future data from proto-historical Trio sites, and in this way contribute to an as yet largely unknown post-1492 history of the Surinamese-Amerindian interior.