Functions of Bronze Age pottery in the light of interdisciplinary research

The Bronze Age, which begins in Central Europe around 2300 BC, is characterized by an unprecedented formal richness of clay vessels - from huge storage vessels with a capacity of several hundred liters to miniature vessels only a few centimeters high. Extremely numerous collections, especially well-preserved vessels from cemeteries, became the basis for creating detailed typological divisions, as well as for drawing conclusions about the chronology of the groups or stylistic changes in the form and ornamentation. Still, little is said about the actual function of pottery. The names commonly used by archaeologists (such as "bowl", "vase" or "pot", "scoop") are given on the basis of appearance and size, not their supposed function. Another simplified interpretation assumes that the vessels found at the sedimentation site are utility ceramics, and those found in the cemetery are non-utility ceramics. The aim of the project is to recognize the functions of clay vessels and understand their importance in everyday life in south-west Poland in the Bronze Age (ca. 2300-750/700 BC).

To investigate a selected issue, I want to answer the following questions:

1. Did the morphological differentiation of clay vessels influence their presumed function? Can the forms of vessels for storing, processing and serving food be identified?
2. Did the method of implementation (clay preparation, surface treatment, firing temperature, etc.) influence the function of the vessels?
3. Were the ceramics used in funeral ceremonies produced in a completely different way than that used on sediments? Can we find in the graves both ceramics bearing traces of earlier use, and ceramics made especially for this occasion?

An important element of the project is the study of microtraces resulting from the use of vessels (attritions) and the creation of the first database of traces for ceramic artefacts. So far, there are bases for flint, bone or metal artefacts. The creation of such a library of traces will allow the use of a new research method, which is traceology on ceramic vessels, also in relation to other archaeological periods. Thanks to specialized research (vessel content analyses, the analyses of the composition of pottery paste, thermal analyses and physical properties of pottery) it will be possible to indicate the supposed functions of various types of vessels. Interpretation of the analyses results will contribute to broadening the knowledge in the field of storing, preparing and serving food.