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# Sharing meals from the past. An innovative method to understand pottery function : case study from the late Neolithic of the south of France

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## Résumé

In a time period where written sources are absent, functional studies unveil important social information. However, functional studies remain scarce, contrariwise to typological and technological studies of potteries.

This analysis aims to understand daily life activities through consumption practices, namely cooking, storing and drinking by studying the use-wear of potteries.

Extensive experimental studies have been conducted in order to create a referential of traces. Some contents such as salt, fermented goods, acidic liquids, burnt food etc., put ceramics under such stress that they leave important marks in the pottery walls. Each trace bares a distinctive signature that is used for identification. Organic chemistry and pre-existing ethnological data have also been used to enrich and test the referential of traces.

These experimental results have been compared to over a thousand pots from the late Neolithic of the south of France (3500 - 2300 B.C.).

Recurring use-wear show a distinctive link between form and function. Some innovative results, regarding drinking practices, show that small polished cups appear to have been used in numerous occurrences to consume acidic and fermented liquids.

Functional analysis can also be used to better understand the function of sites. For example, distinctive traces in potteries show that some sites in the plateaus had the sole function of collecting, drying and storing massive quantities of seasonal goods (such as berries in *Clos d'Aubarne, Gard* and berries and acorn in *Boussargues, Hérault*). These sites are to be put in link with big villages from the plain where, in a contrastive way, a diversity of activities can be identified in the use wear of pots.

This innovative method of use-wear analysis allow us to better understand food habits and daily life activities in time periods that lack written or iconographical sources.

This communication aims to share and discuss the methodology and the results of use wear studies and functional approaches.

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