Which ceramic styles mark breaks in the Bronze Age chronology? Fortified tell sites populate the Great Hungarian Plain in the second millennium BC, and ceramic styles from these sites have traditionally served as benchmarks for the local chronology. At the end of the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1450 CalBC), the tells are abandoned, marking a new phase of occupation on the Great Hungarian Plain. People may leave the area, and local settlement patterns change. But what does the evidence away from the tell sites tell us about culture change at the Middle-Late Bronze Age boundary? In this poster, we present a radiocarbon-based chronology of the most common stylistic elements found on ceramics in the Békés 103 cemetery in Eastern Hungary.

How we did it. After formal and stylistic coding of mortuary ceramic, we used 29 AMS dates from closed funerary contexts to plot the duration of a range of ceramic attributes (Fig. 1). Boxes with grave numbers represent the range in years CalBC at the 95th confidence interval.

What we found. We discovered that the cemetery was first used as early as 2450-2200 CalBC (Phase 1), followed by a period of disuse (Phase 2, 2200-1700 CalBC). Use of the cemetery resumed 1700-1600 CalBC (Phase 3), with the heaviest period of use within 1600-1300 CalBC (Phase 4). Infrequent burials continue 1300-1000 CalBC (Phase 5). The heaviest phases of use represents the second half of the Middle Bronze Age and the beginning of the Late Bronze Age. Channeling, bosses, spirals, and other decorations form the core of this heavy usage between 1600 and 1300 CalBC.

What we learned. Stylistic breaks do seem to be evident in the ceramic chronology, but they fall at 1600 and 1300 CalBC. Ceramic attributes continue to be used right across the Middle-Late Bronze Age boundary, and some even persist until 1000 CalBC. These data suggest that whatever force accounts for the abandonment of the tells, no such influence (or at least a much delayed influence) disrupted people’s stylistic signaling in Eastern Hungary.