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Reviewed Article:

Experimental Research on the Setting up and Exploitation of the Human Prehistoric Habitat in the Middle Dniester Region

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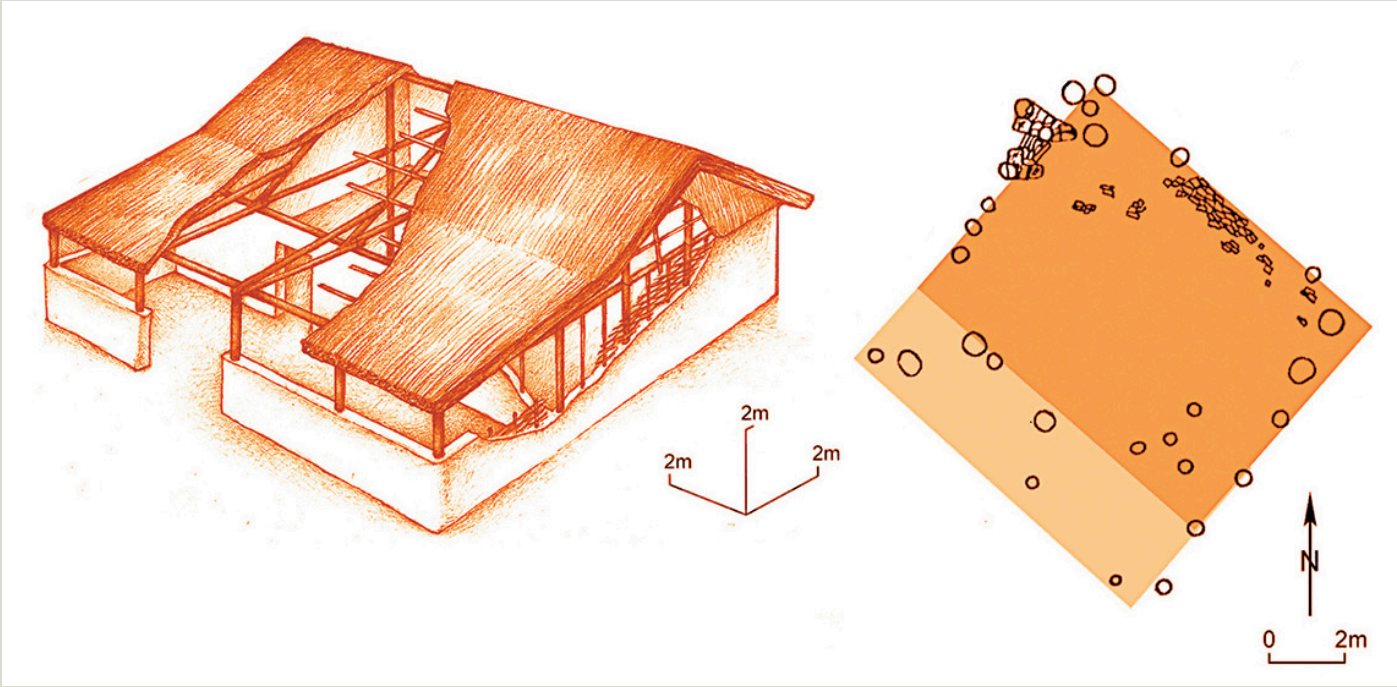

The research of archaeological monuments in the Middle Dniester basin over the last two decades has highlighted a series of new data on the evolution of human communities during the first Iron Age (8th to 10th centuries BC), demonstrating the advanced level and original

character of Cozia-Saharna communities (Kashuba, 2000; Niculiţă and Nicic, 2002; Niculiţă, et al., 2003; Niculiţă and Nicic, 2007; Niculiţă, Zanoci and Arnăut, 2007; Zanoci and Băţ, 2007; Kašuba, 2008, p.40; Niculiţă and Nicic, 2008; Niculiţă, et al., 2008).

> The stages of the experiment were reflected in various educational activities with the involvement of students, tourist promotion of archaeological, didactic-academic sites in the organization of public courses of experimental archeology, and scientific reports in conferences and symposiums.

Project incipience

The link established between EXARC and the Scientific Research Laboratory "*Thracology*" (Moldova State University) inspired the initiation of the first major project in the field of experimental archeology for the Republic of Moldova. The purpose of this project was to organize an experimental archeological open-air park in Saharna-Ţiglău (Nicic, 2009).

The Saharna-Ţiglău archaeological site is located on a dominant terrace of the Dniester riverbank, in the northern part of the Saharna village, Rezina rayon, about 100 km northeast of Chisinau, the capital of the Republic of Moldova.

The archaeological monuments from Saharna-Ţiglău are represented by an open settlement and a tumuli necropolis, attributed to the Cozia-Saharna culture which existed between the 10th to 8th centuries BC. The archaeological research carried out on these archaeological sites have proven the existence of one or several human communities which attained a notable degree of aesthetics in their material culture, making them at the forefront of the civilizations of the First Iron Age in South-Eastern Europe (Kashuba and Goltseva, 1991; Kashuba, 2000; Niculiţă and Nicic, 2008). This historical era served as the driving force for the foundation of a prehistoric open-air experimental park, reconstructed based on artifacts identified during archaeological investigations at several archaeological sites in the middle of the Dniester Basin.

Under the conduct of the "*Thracology*" Scientific Research Laboratory, Saharna-Ţiglău has been preparing work at the Saharna-Ţiglău outdoor archaeological park since 2008. Within these activities, teachers, volunteers and students from the "Archeology" and "History" specialties of the Moldova State University who are practicing the "Experimental Archeology" discipline, have been involved.The project was encouraged and financially supported by the owner of the land Mr. Victor Lupascu, the director of the "Max-Victor" enterprise from Rezina, thanks to whom it was possible to reconstruct a home from the Cozia-Saharna culture.

Archaeological context

The complex, consisting of three surface dwellings, was discovered in the Alcedar III settlement by Dr. M. Kaşuba. The reconstruction model proposed by Ivan Litsuk (See Figure 1)

(Kašuba, 2007) was used as a model for the reconstruction of the Cozia-Saharna habitat in Saharna-Ţiglău. A similar dwelling 7×9 m^2 (Construction I) was uncovered during the Saharna-Ţiglău archaeological investigations in 2007-2009, and researched under the leadership of the university professors, Dr. Hab., I. Niculiţă and Dr. conf. Andrei Nicic (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014). These two cases formed the documentary-methodological support for the realization of the reconstruction experiment of the living space characteristic to the Cozia-Saharna culture.

The aim of the experiment

The aim of the experiment was the reconstruction of a prehistoric dwelling in the Early Iron Age. The main objectives being the estimation of the quantity of material used in the construction, the determination of how many people were needed for the task, as well as the time required for the realization of such a project. Other objectives of the experiment were: the reconstruction and the possibilities of applying the supposed prehistoric construction techniques of the surface dwellings based on the archaeological remains of Saharna-Ţiglău, namely the fragments of clay bonding with the prints of the building materials, debris of the of the charcoal wood frame, the dimensions and the planography of the post holes etc. (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014, p.22, fig.98), all of which are largely reflected through the ethnographic data.

Conducting the experiment

The documentation necessary for the reconstruction of the first dwelling from Saharna-Ţiglău served as the graphic reconstruction for the surface dwelling no. II from Alcedar III. This dwelling which was 9×9 m square, with the entrance to the southwest (See Figure 1).

The first stage of the experiment consisted in raising the wooden frame of the dwelling, matching the planography, dimensions and location of the post holes, as well as the orientation of the dwelling-model. For this purpose, on the entire perimeter of the dwelling surface was dug with post holes of 0.3-0.4 m diameter and 0.5 m depth, in which they were buried at a certain distance vertically and which were to outline the frame of the dwelling. The chosen posts were made from trunks of trees (acacia, elm, oak or horn) from the nearby forest, with various diameters, between 0.25-0.3 m, corresponding to some burnt posts discovered during excavations from Saharna-Ţiglău. To support the roof posts which were located through the middle of the dwelling, large pits were dug on the long side, similar to the observations of Building 1 from Saharna-Ţiglău, which involved a roof in two slides (See Figure 2). The post holes were filled with gravel and earth, and the posts were pounded into place with wooden hammers. The entire structure was tied with cords made of lime bark prepared at the time or with cords made of linen (See Figure 3), in total, approximately 300 m of cords were used during the experiment.

The next stage of the experiment consisted of joining the vertical posts with horizontal beams marking the outer walls and the roof casing, thus finishing the wooden frame of the dwelling (See Figure 4a-b).

The third stage of the reconstruction of the dwelling consisted of weaving the walls of the dwelling with thin wooden branches on vertical poles (See Figure 4c-d). The analysis of the fragments of daub from the walls, from which the branch prints were preserved, was discovered during the archaeological research in Saharna-Ţiglău (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014, p.22, fig.98). These discoveries indicated the use of branches for weaving the walls, which usually did not exceed a diameter of 1.5-3 cm.

Simultaneously with the joining of the walls of the wooden frame, the roofing of the dwelling and the porch was finished on the access side of the dwelling by fixing the lateral wood beams reinforced with longitudinally arranged logs.

As a result of these stages, completed in April 2008, the wood frame of the dwelling was largely finished. The quantified material effort was approximately 25 m^3 of wood and approximately 300 m of rope and the mobilization of about 30 people for six days.

The next stage consisted of laying the reed roof in several episodes in the spring of 2008 - autumn 2009 along with covering the walls with clay (May, July 2012). The process of reinforcing the walls with a thick clay layer were consistent with the archaeological data, which gave us some details about the clay composition and the thickness of the daub which was approx. 4-5 cm and required about six tons of clay, straw and 500 liters of water (See Figure 6a-f). The reconstruction of the roof has caused several discussions. For the raw material, it was decided to use reeds, as the arguments for this selection has been supported by the ethnographic data, and its abundance in the Dniester meadow - a situation probably not changed since prehistoric times (See Figure 5a-b). For the roof and wall installation, approximately 1700 reed bundles were used.

The archaeological experiment was completed with a controlled burning of the dwelling, the documentation of the burning processes and its impact on the archaeological material (See Figure 7a-g, 9c-g).

The burning took place on September 29, 2012 at 12.00, with a large audience participation: members of the Department of Archeology and Ancient History and students of the Moldova State University headed by PhD, professor, I. Niculiţă and Head of Scientific Research Laboratory "Thracology" Dr., Conf., A. Nicic; V. Lupascu with collaborators from "Max-Victor" SRL; the local community; media representatives (privesc.eu, Ziarul de Gardă, PrimeTv); Assoc. Professor Dr. V. Cotiugă[1] , Dr. C. Nicu with representatives of the Formatting and Interdisciplinary Research Platform in Archaeology „Arheoinvest” from „Al. I. Cuza” University of Iaşi; Dr. P. Guran, Romanian Cultural Institute „Mihai Eminescu” of Chişinău.

During the three hour incineration, between 12.00-15.00 (See Figure 7a-c, 9c-d), the temperatures reached at different points of the house were documented. A portable infrared thermometer was used to measure these differences (OS523-2 OMEGASCOPE, High-Temperature Handheld Infrared Thermometer), offered by the Arheoinvest colleagues (See Figure 8a-b). All values were measured according to the house plan, with nine measuring points set (See Figure 10a). Data was taken on the vertical axis in the three levels of the vertical posts of the dwelling - upper, middle and lower, until the walls collapsed, after which all measurements were taken from the base (See Figure 10b). About 6-8 minutes after the fire started, the reed roof of the house burned completely and collapsed inside. After about 1.5 hours from the beginning of the fire, the clay walls of the dwelling collapsed, from which only the vertical posts of the framing remained standing. Thus, after about 3 hours and 20 minutes after the fire commenced, a ruin remained on the site of the building, consisting of agglomerations of burnt clay, ash, charcoal and pieces of fallen or still smoldering posts (See Figure 7d-g, 9e-g).
The statistic analysis[2] of the resultant temperatures correlated in time allowed us to highlight the points of peak temperatures. The first was documented after about 20 minutes of burning, reaching a maximum of 650°C (See Figure 10b), the intensity of the temperatures on the plan at different points was followed for about 3 hours (See Figure 11a-b), which allowed the analysis of the temperature dynamics.

After about 12 months from the date of the fire, the ruins of the building were still visible, clearly showing the outline of the dwelling. On the surface agglomerates of burned clay with branch prints and carbonized pillar fragments were visible along with the interior structure of the burnt dwelling (See Figure 9h). Remains of the burnt clay walls were mostly concentrated on the outer perimeter of the dwelling, having a thickness of about 20-40 cm at the current stepping surface, encircling the perimeter of roof burning residues. There were interesting observations related to the context and the preservation of the construction posts. After the complete burning, the contours of some posts on the perimeter of the dwelling were outlined (See Figure 9h). Some posts from the wood frame, did not burn completely and they stood for a short time being consolidated by ruins. This can be explained by the process of the preservation of the ruins of the dwelling at the time of the collapse when it was burned, (See Figure 9e-g). With the collapse of the ruins and the burning or complete rotting of the base of the pairs, the holes in which they were placed were emptied (See Figure 9g-h). As evidenced by the archaeological context of Saharna-Ţiglău Building 1 (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014, pp. 19-25; p. 312, Figure 97: 1-2, 5a-b, 6-8), they were filled with later deposits, leaving the impression that the posts were "beaten" in the soil down to the sterile loess, thus perforating the compact layer in this area, as well as the ruin platform, and, partially, the sterile layer (See Figure 9a-b).

Through its results, the last stage of the experiment have substantially contributed to the knowledge of the details of the degradation phenomenon of prehistoric dwellings, certified

under archaeological conditions in the form of ruins and remains of archaeological materials with secondary burning traces (See Figure 9a-h).

Results of the experiment

1. This determined the relevance of the prehistoric construction methods and techniques used by human communities in the early Iron Age era in the Saharna area.
2. The result of the experiment allowed for the estimation of the workload and the human potential necessary for the spatial settlement of the prehistoric space, establishing the socio-cultural dimensions and the level of organization of the human communities during the first Iron Age.
3. Controlled burning of the reconstructed dwelling (documenting thermal oscillations) has allowed the recording of the various processes of burning and preservation the remains of the material culture in situ, thus explaining the nature of the formation of some archaeological realities that could be interpreted with ambiguity. For example, we managed to explain the presence of some pits in the platform of the surface dwelling researched at the Saharna-Ţiglău settlement (See Figure 9a-b) (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014, pp.19-20, 312, Figure 97), which gave the impression of being dug after the dwelling was no longer in use. Experimentally, it has been shown that during the collapse of the burned construction, these wooden posts did not burn completely and remained standing for a short time and were "handcuffed" in the smoldering ruins of the construction (See Figure 9e) (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014, p. 312, Figure 97: 5a-b, 6-7). With the collapse of the ruins and the rotting of the base of the posts, a void was created (Figure 9h) which, in turn, was filled with subsequent deposits, leaving the impression that the posts were "beaten" in the soil to the sterile loess, perforating the platform layer of the compact ruin in this area and, in part, the sterile layer (Niculiţă and Nicic, 2014, p. 312, Figure 97: 1-2).
4. Involving the general public in the experiment allowed for the promotion of cultural and historical information at national and international level in order to showcase and protect the national cultural and historical heritage.

The stages of the experiment were reflected in various educational activities with the involvement of students, tourist promotion of archaeological, didactic-academic sites in the organization of public courses of experimental archeology, and scientific reports in conferences and symposiums.

Overall, the archaeological experiment carried out in Saharna-Ţiglău was quite costly in terms of raw material, time and workload, both within the limits of contemporary and prehistoric man's values. In total about 25 m^3 of wooden material, 300 m of rope, the effort of several dozen people and a period of about six days of intense work were used to prepare materials and build a dwelling specific to the Cozia-Saharna wood structure with the size of 81 m^2. This

effort involved a collective and organized mobilization of a large patriarchal family, specific to the First Iron Age.

The first archaeological experiment in the Republic of Moldova presented a particularly important step for the archaeological research in the Republic of Moldova. This was also demonstrated through the reconstruction of a home from the first Iron Age in Saharna-Ţiglău using sources of archaeological and ethnographic origin. This will allow the use of additional categories of scientific sources provided by experimental archeology during the analysis and interpretation of the archaeological material.

1 We wish to express cordial thanks to Mr. Assoc. Professor Dr. V. Cotiugă ("Al. I. Cuza" University of Iasi), for methodical consultations and the provided temperature measurement equipment, during the final stage of the experiment.

2 We would like to thank Dr. Dan Ştefan (National Museum of the Eastern Carpathians) for useful advice and help in statistical processing of the obtained data.

Keywords (re)construction
archaeological open-air museum
fire
experiment

Country Moldova

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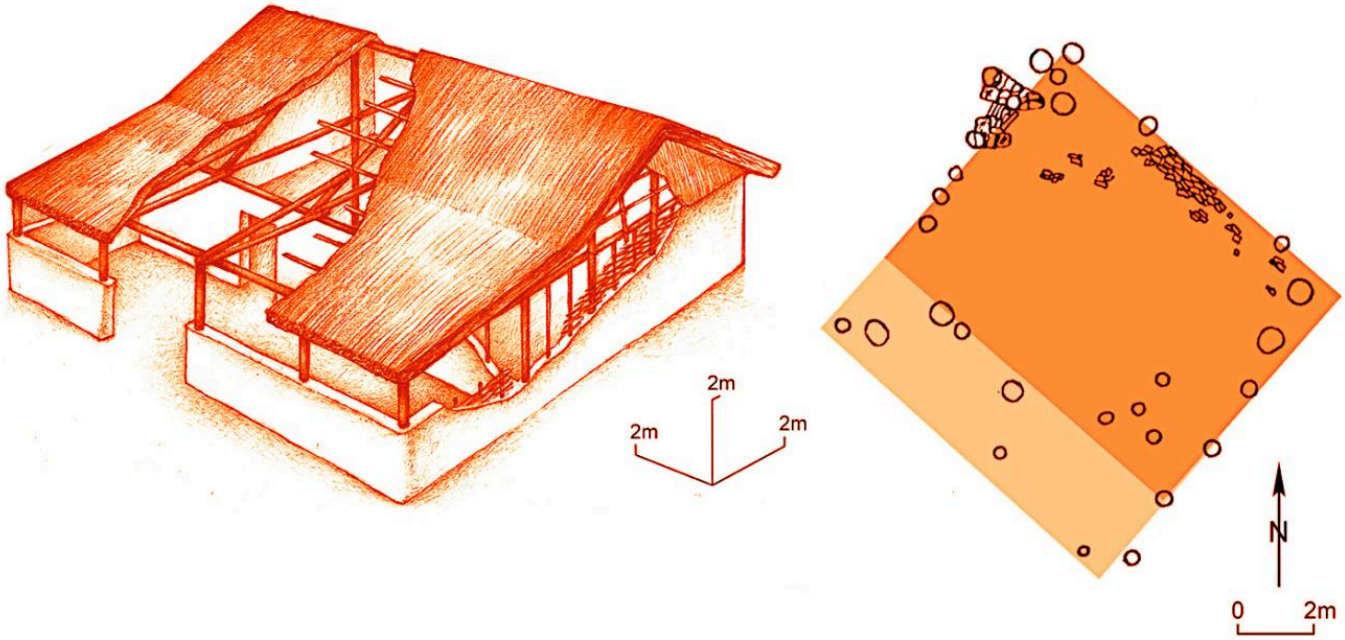

FIG 1. ALCEDAR III, PLAN OF EXCAVATION AND GRAPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF DWELLING II (AFTER KAŠUBA 2007).

FIG 2. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. HORIZONTAL PILLAR OF THE CONSTRUCTION.

FIG 3A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. PREPARATION OF ROPES.

FIG 3B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. PREPARATION OF ROPES.

FIG 4A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. WEAVING WALLS FROM RODS.

FIG 4B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. WEAVING WALLS FROM RODS.

FIG 4C. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. WEAVING WALLS FROM RODS.

FIG 4D. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. WEAVING WALLS FROM RODS.

FIG 5A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. BUILDING THE ROOF FROM REED.

FIG 5B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. BUILDING THE ROOF FROM REED.

FIG 6A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. PREPARATION OF CLAY AND SMEARING THE WALLS WITH CLAY.

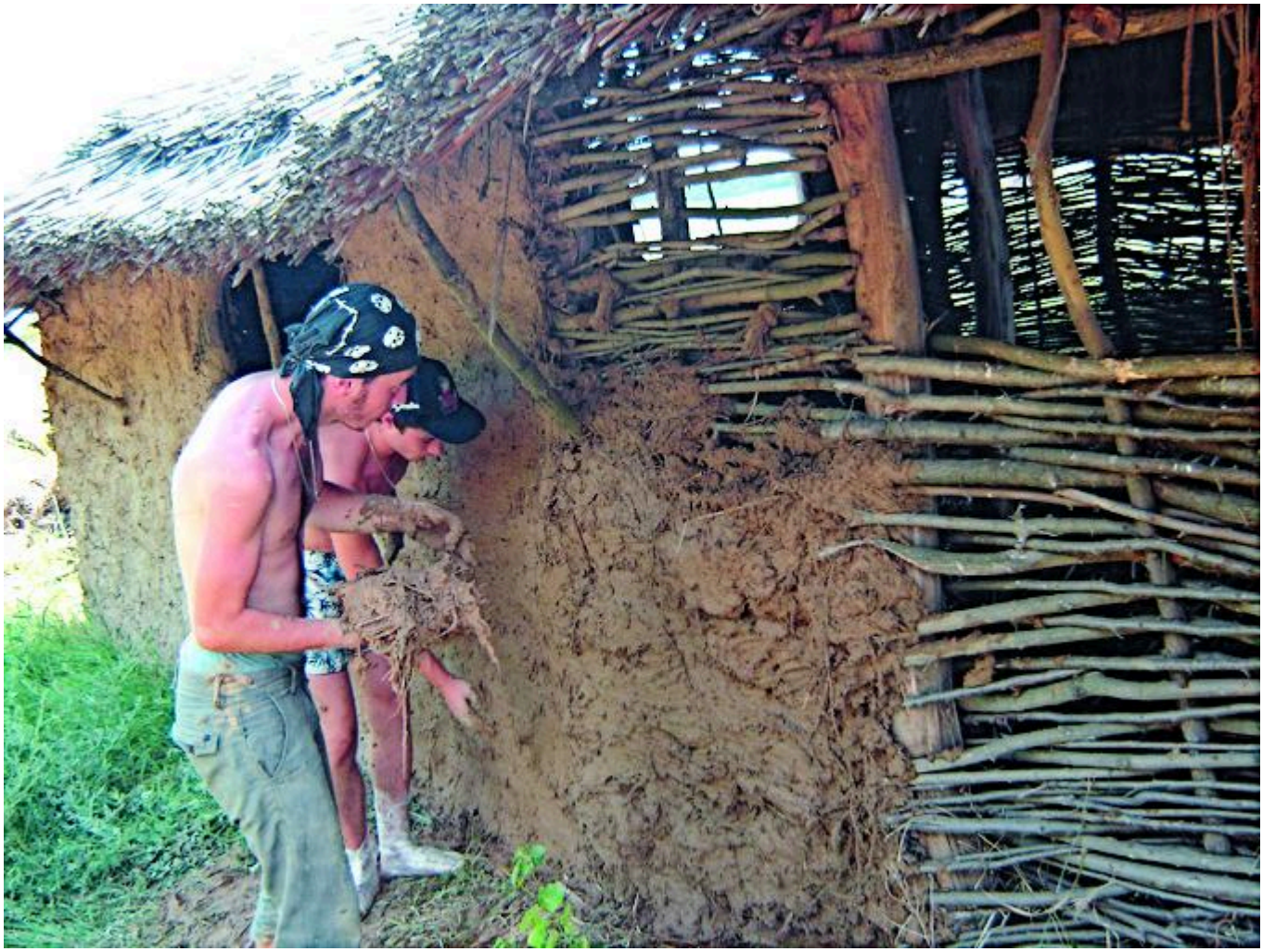

FIG 6B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. PREPARATION OF CLAY AND SMEARING THE WALLS WITH CLAY.

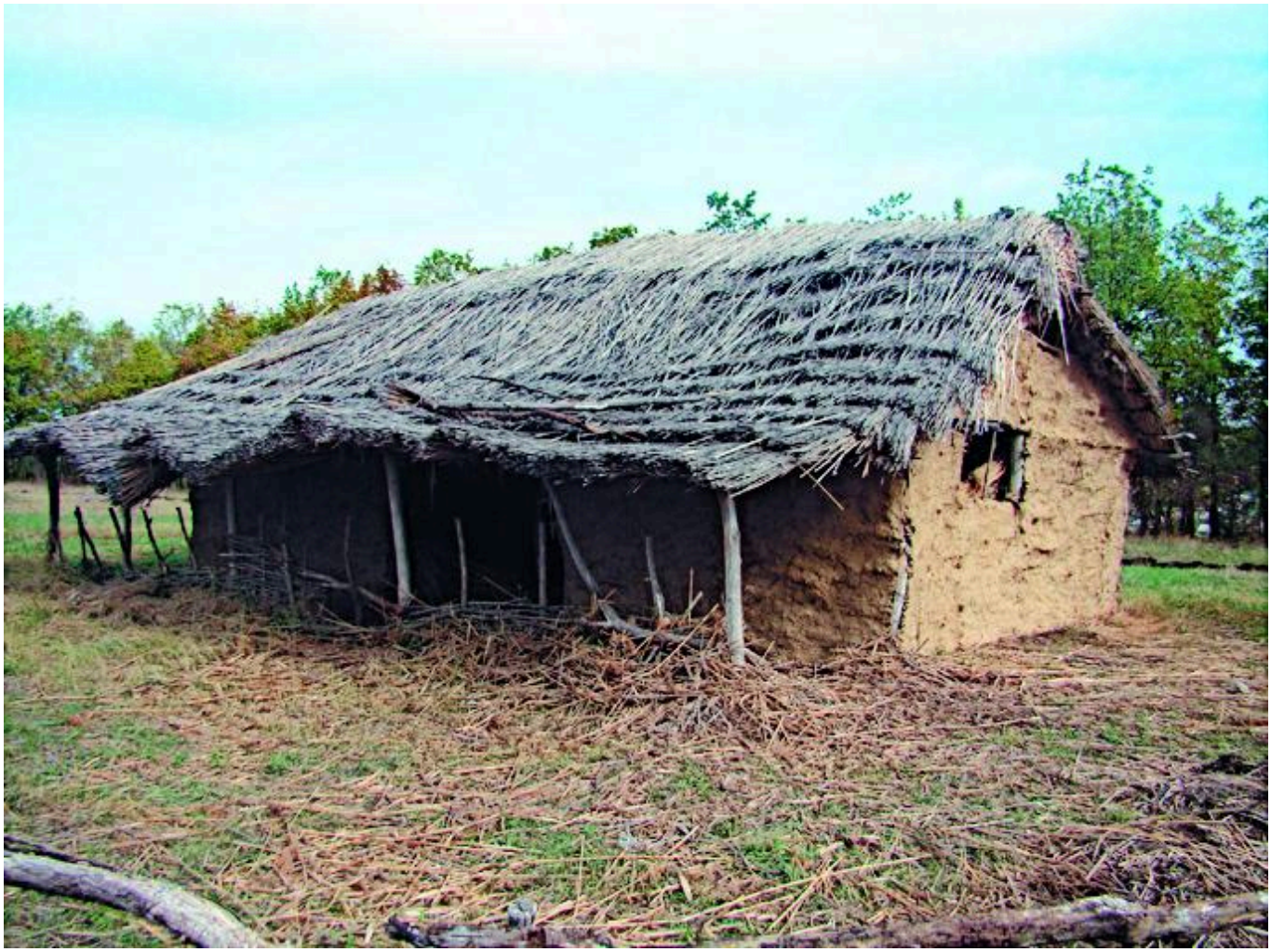

FIG 6C. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RECONSTRUCTED DWELLING IN THE FINAL PHASE.

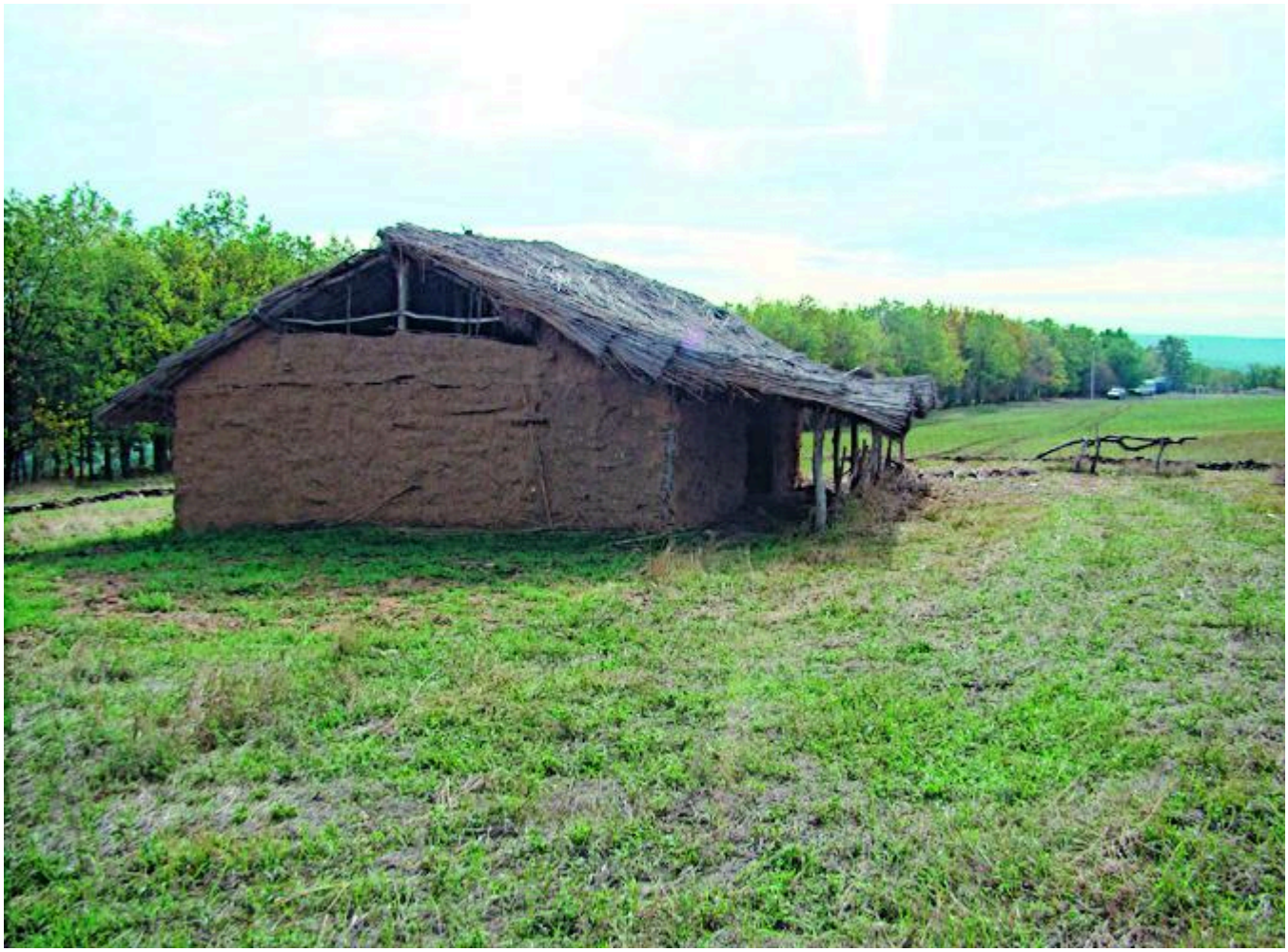

FIG 6D. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RECONSTRUCTED DWELLING IN THE FINAL PHASE.

FIG 6E. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RECONSTRUCTED DWELLING IN THE FINAL PHASE.

FIG 6F. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RECONSTRUCTED DWELLING IN THE FINAL PHASE.

FIG 6G. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE PARTICIPANTS.

FIG 7A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE DWELLING SET ON FIRE.

FIG 7B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE DWELLING SET ON FIRE.

FIG 7C. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE DWELLING SET ON FIRE.

FIG 7D. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RUINS OF THE DWELLING AT 3 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES AFTER FIRING UP.

FIG 7E. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RUINS OF THE DWELLING AT 3 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES AFTER FIRING UP.

FIG 7F. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RUINS OF THE DWELLING AT 3 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES AFTER FIRING UP.

FIG 7G. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. RUINS OF THE DWELLING AT 3 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES AFTER FIRING UP.

FIG 8A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. TEMPERATURE MEASUREMENT.

FIG 8B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. TEMPERATURE MEASUREMENT.

FIG 9A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. C37, CONSTR. 1. STRATIGRAPHIC CORRELATION OF POST HOLES AND HOUSEHOLD PITS WITH THE RUINS OF THE CONSTRUCTION, VIEW FROM EAST.

FIG 9B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. C37, CONSTR. 1. POST HOLES PRESERVED IN THE CONSTRUCTION RUINS.

FIG 9C. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. ARCHAEOLOGICAL OPEN-AIR PARK FROM SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU, BURNING THE RECONSTRUCTED DWELLING.

FIG 9D. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. ARCHAEOLOGICAL OPEN-AIR PARK FROM SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU, BURNING THE RECONSTRUCTED DWELLING.

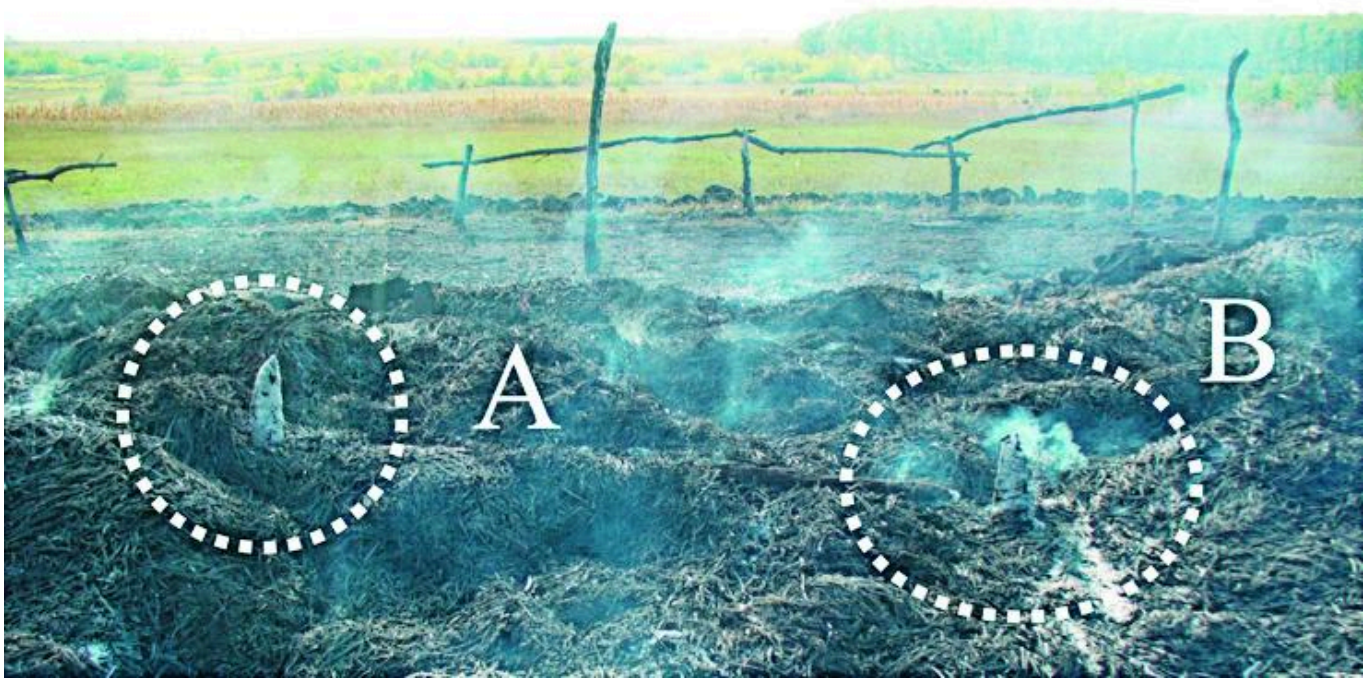

FIG 9E. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT.

FIG 9F. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU.THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT.

FIG 9G. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT.

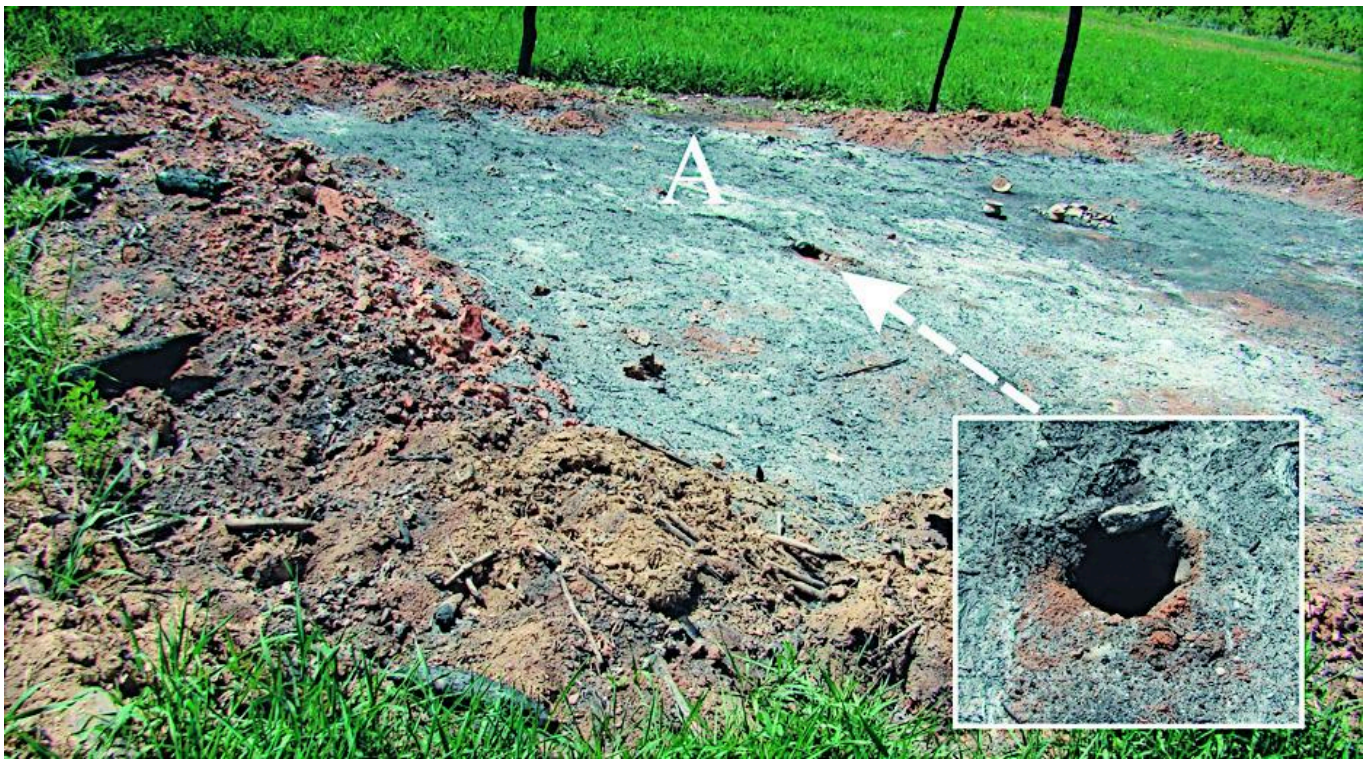

FIG 9H. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. THE RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXPERIMENT.

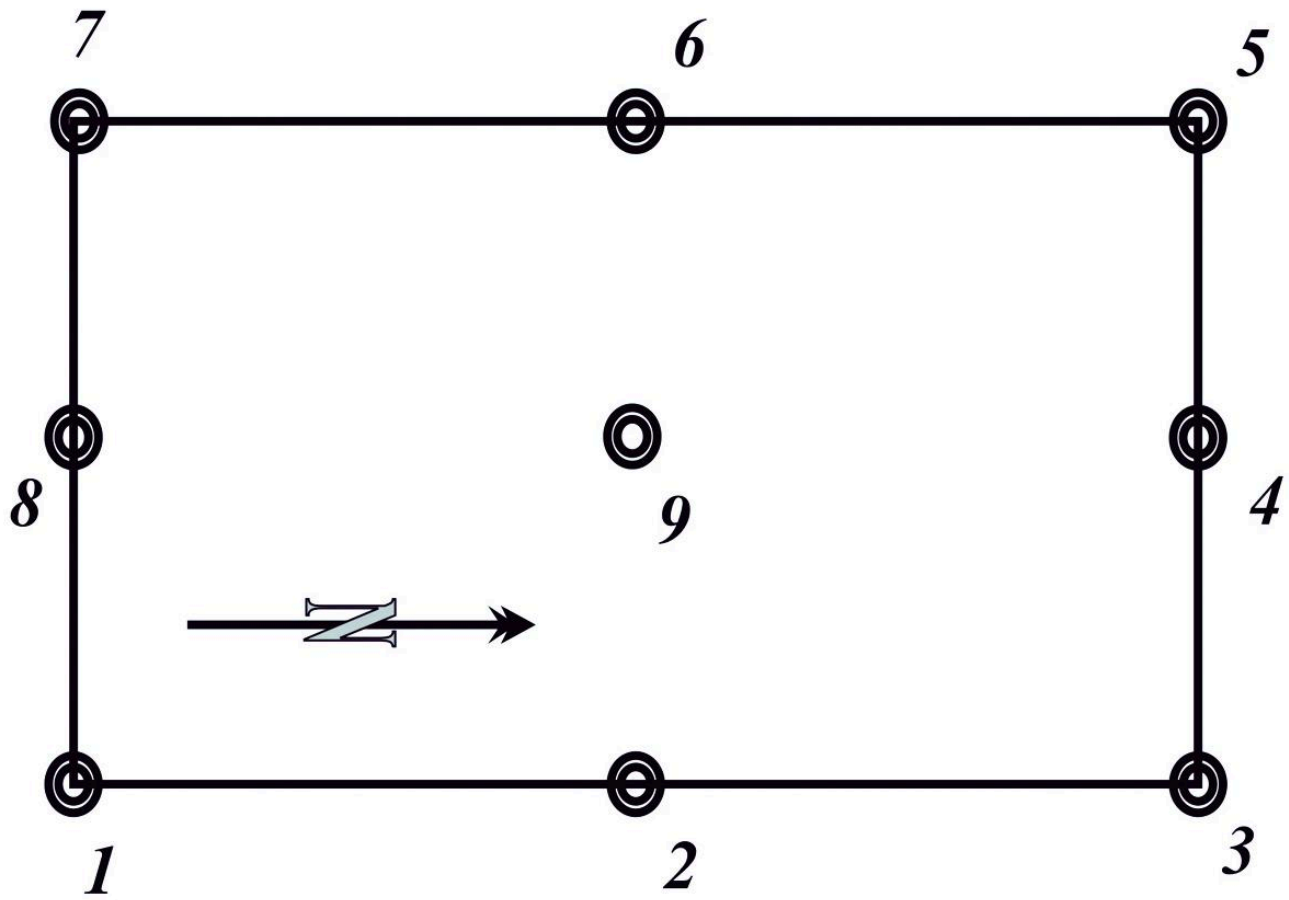

FIG 10A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. PLANOGRAMS OF THE DWELLING WITH TEMPERATURE MEASURING POINTS.

hours	part	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12:08	up	24	26	23	23	23	23	23	22	
	middle	25	29	25	24	23	23	23	23	
	down	26	31	25	23	22	22	22	23	
12:22	up	72	123	91	121	133	158	200	460	
	middle	73	95	81	98	119	125	160	650	
	down	64	94	79	115	124	130	154	583	
12:30	up	138	144	262	128	181	134	317	283	
	middle	130	133	162	157	179	91	199	294	
	down	183	240	253	332	449	107	305	420	
12:36	up	262	447	121	128	336	484	397	409	
	middle	274	136	100	98	121	91	413	357	
	down	267	277	119	266	306	272	345	227	
12:50	up	239	248	103	312	248	186	252	204	
	middle	301	159	84	177	304	214	241	245	
	down	337	353	71	217	146	143	441	282	
12:52	up									
	middle									
	down									538
13:03	up			57				212	172	
	middle			73	116	296		277	217	
	down	330	243	72	88	157	132	341	228	
13:15	up									
	middle									
	down	275	273	334	104	114	86	263	281	
14:10	down	507	536	71	283	634	231	417	318	
14:15	down									394
15:02	down	302	239	74	248	318	98	553	127	

FIG 10B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. COMPARATIVE TABLE OF OBTAINED VALUES AT CHRONOLOGIC INTERVALS.

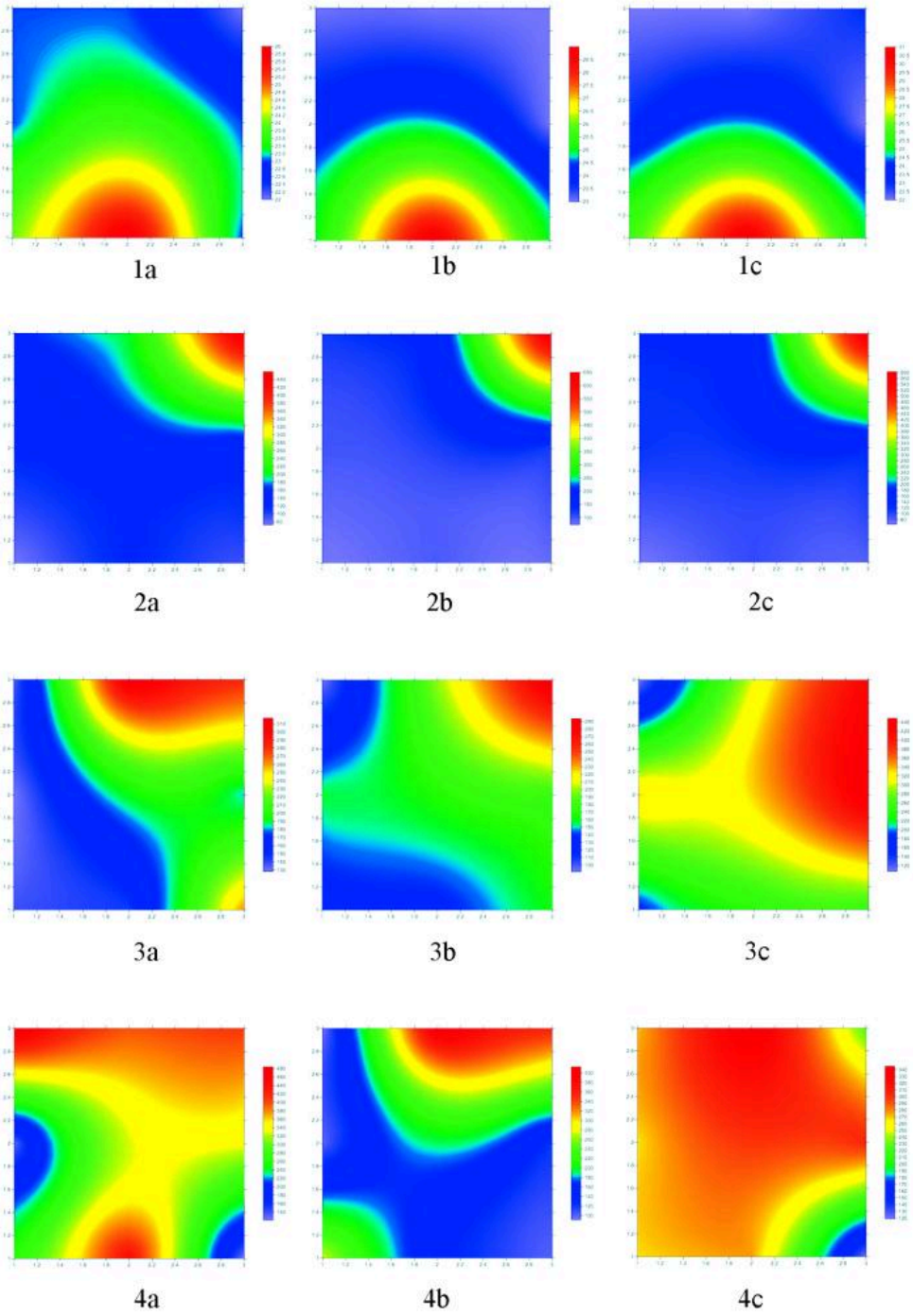

FIG 11A. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. TEMPERATURE INDICATIONS IN THE PLANOGRAM OF THE DWELLING DURING BURNING: 1 – 12:08 HOURS (A - UP; B - MIDDLE; C - DOWN); 2 – 12:22 HOURS (A - UP; B - MIDDLE; C - DOWN); 3 – 12:30 HOURS (A - UP; B - MIDDLE; C - DOWN); 4 – 12:36 HOURS (A - UP; B - MIDDLE; C - DOWN).

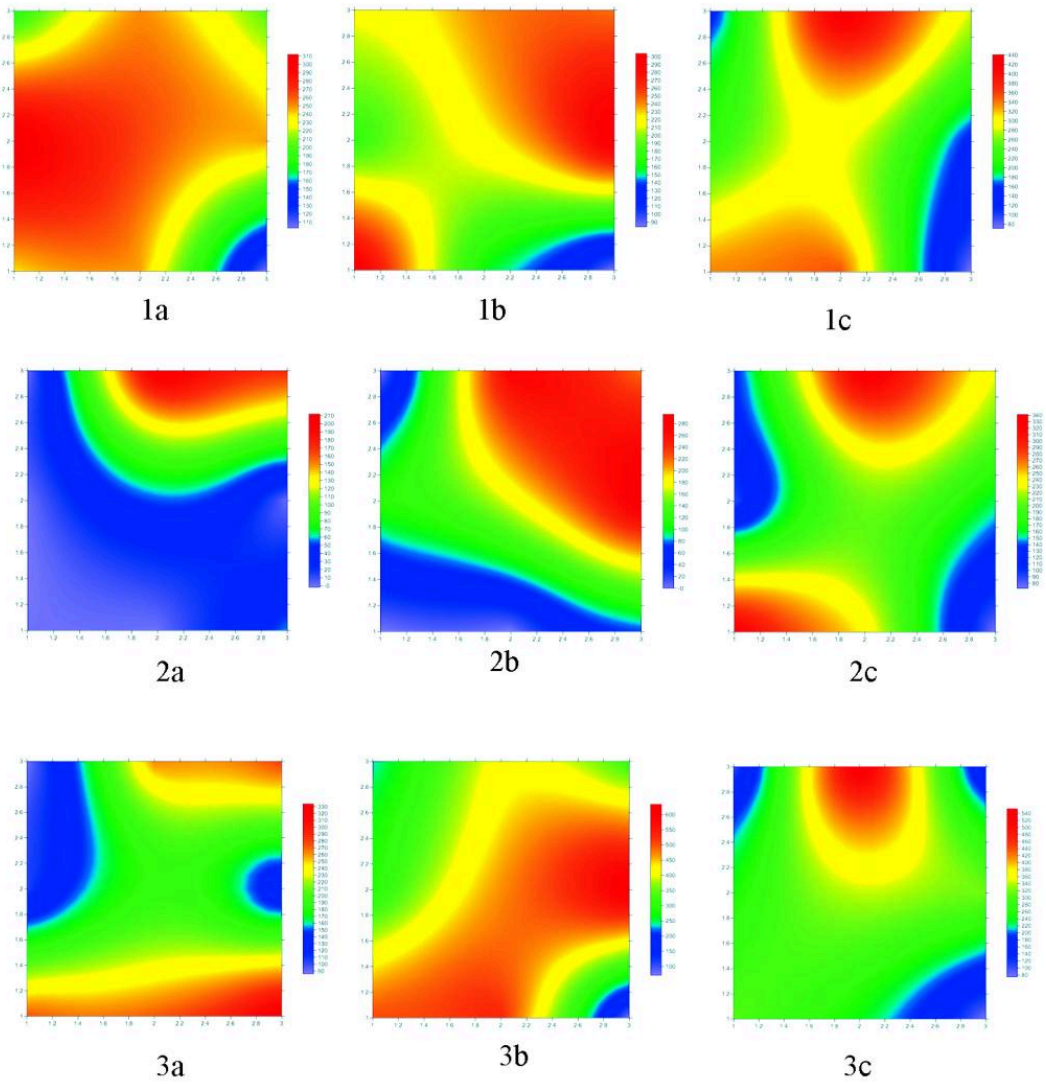

FIG 11B. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. TEMPERATURE INDICATIONS IN THE PLANOGRAM OF THE DWELLING DURING BURNING: 1 – 12:50 HOURS (A - UP; B - MIDDLE; C - DOWN); 2 – 13:03 HOURS (A - UP; B - MIDDLE; C - DOWN); 3A – 13:15 HOURS AT THE BASE; 3B – 14:10 HOURS AT THE BASE; 3C – 15:02 HOURS AT THE BASE.

FIG 12. SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU. STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS OF MOLDOVA STATE UNIVERSITY DURING THE INTERNSHIPS IN EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY HELD AT THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL PARK SAHARNA-ŢIGLĂU.