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Lightweight dwellings of the Funnel Beaker Culture from Vynnyky-Lysivka (Western Ukraine) and the phase CII of the Tripolye Culture from Gordiniști II-Stînca goală (Northern Moldova) as examples of houses from the late 4th Millennium BC

The paper presents the issue of house constructions from the second half of the 4th millennium BC in western Ukraine and northern Moldova. While numerous reports concerning the dwellings of the Funnel Beaker Culture from the area east of the Bug River has been published, these accounts did not provide enough information to precisely assess their construction details. The first such structure whose features can be described in detail is the house from the site Lysivka in Vynnyky. The construction of the dwelling was lightweight, analogous to residential structures from the eastern group of the Funnel Beaker Culture. Another debatable topic was the characteristics of houses of the Gordiniști group of the Tripolye Culture. Archaeological research at the site of Gordiniști II-Stînca goală proved that communities of the late stage of this culture lived in lightweight houses that were built using clay. Neither the residential structures from the Vynnyky-Lysivka site, nor those from the site of Gordiniști II-Stînca goală, should be regarded as analogy to the classical “ploshchadkas” of the Tripolye Culture.

KEY WORDS: dwellings, Funnel Beaker Culture, Gordiniști group, western Ukraine, northern Moldova

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INTRODUCTION

Despite numerous reports of discoveries of postholes or clusters of construction clay, interpreted as remains of dwellings, until recently it has been difficult to unequivocally describe the features of residential structures of the Funnel Beaker Culture (FBC) from the area of western Ukraine (Hawinskyj, Pasterkiewicz, Rybicka 2013; Rybicka 2017; Rybicka, Hawinskyj, Pasterkiewicz 2019). Archaeological excavations carried out between 2016 and 2019 at the site Lysivka in Vynnyky (Fig. 1) provide the basis for describing the construction details of houses and allow to verify previous assessments published in the archaeological literature (Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021).

Another debatable issue was the identification of the characteristic traits of dwellings of the Gordiniști group of the stage CII Tripolye Culture from northern Moldova (Fig. 1). In his monograph of the late stage of this culture, Valentin Dergachev (Dergachev 1980, 120) only broadly wrote that in the discussed period there were two main types of houses: sunken dwellings and structures with no foundations. The remains of the latter form of residential structure are very characteristic collapsed layers of burnt daub. According to G. Sîrbu and D. Król (2021, 103), until recently, the knowledge of distinctive features of dwellings of the Horodîștea-Gordiniști group was quite limited and insufficient. For example, on the basis of published data it was not possible to assess the construction details of houses and the ways in which they were used (e.g. Dergachev 1980; Pozikhovskyj 2019; Verteletsyki 2020). It would be interesting to determine whether they were built and utilized in the same way as dwellings of the earlier Brînzeni group from northern Moldova (Markevich 1981).

In this paper, residential structures from the site Vynnyky-Lysivka and Gordiniști II-Stînca goală (Fig. 1), alongside their genetical context, will be presented as examples of houses from the late 4th millennium BC in the area between the Bug and Prut River.

FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE: VYNNYKY-LYSIVKA

In the archaeological literature, we can find information on clusters of burnt daub from the Bug River zone and western Ukraine, which were interpreted as remains of houses. Sadly, the way these structures were explored and published did not provide an adequate basis for an unambiguous assessment of their characteristics (Cynkalowski 1961; Gumiński 1989; Peleshchysyn 2004; Konopla, Gavins’kij 2013; Rybicka,
Hawinskyj, Pasterkiewicz 2019; Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021). Mykola Peleshchysyn (Peleshchysyn 1998a; 1998b; 1998c) described features of this type identified at the Vynnyky-Lysivka site. However, the nature of documented remains was difficult to interpret. Hence, the site was selected for verification research, aiming to obtain more detailed data on these structures. In 2016, a cluster of burnt daub was discovered in the central part of the site. The feature was initially interpreted as remains of an above-ground structure with no foundation (Diachenko et al. 2019). In the pottery assemblage discovered at that time, fragments of Tripolye Culture tableware were distinguished (Rybicka et al. 2018). Taking into account the latter fact, as well as remarks on the similarities of FBC dwellings, for example from Gródek, to the very characteristic houses of the Tripolye Culture (e.g. Gumiński 1989, 22–25), the Vynnyky-Lysivka site has become very important in the context of research concerning relationships between the FBC and the Tripolye Culture (Kośko 1981; Rybicka 2017). Considering the comments mentioned above, the main aim of the archaeological research conducted at the Vynnyky-Lysivka site was to determine whether the types of house construction and the spatial organisation of the settlement resembled the principles typical for the Tripolye Culture groups in the second half of the 4th millennium BC (Markevich 1981; Sîrbu, Król, Heghea 2020).

The excavation of the identified layer of burnt daub and its surroundings was carried out at the Vynnyky-Lysivka in 2016–2019. The area of the established archaeological trench was 2.68 ares (Fig. 2; Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, 16). The research marks the first time when the method of 3D recording of archaeological finds was used in exploration of such structures in western Ukraine.

During the excavation, researchers revealed two clear clusters of daub (southern and northern), located approximately 7 m apart (Fig. 3). Between the two structures, on their eastern side, archaeologists recorded postholes, which marked the eastern and north-eastern extent of the distribution of the construction clay (Fig. 3). The imprints of wattle and twigs were identified on lumps of burnt daub from both clusters (Fig. 4). The unearthed heaps of daub could be identified as remains of collapsed walls, the framework of which was formed by posts situated every 1–2 metres (Fig. 3). The posts supported wattle panels covered with clay. On the basis of these observations, it was concluded that the unearthed structure represented the remains of a dwelling (Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, 20–24), the original length of which was about 7 m, and the width about 4–5 m (Fig. 3). To the north of the described feature, researchers identified a small post construction (Fig. 3), whose exact function is difficult to determine (Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, 18–19).

The distribution of portable archaeological finds in the surroundings of the described features is very interesting (Figs. 5–6). The zone situated east of the clusters of daub was...
Fig. 2. Vynnyky-Lysivka, Lviv region: a – location of the site; b – location of trenches. After Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, ryc. 1; 3; modified
Ryc. 2. Winniki-Lisiwka, rejon lwowski: a – lokalizacja stanowiska; b – lokalizacja wykopów. Wg Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, ryc. 1; 3; ze zmianami
Fig. 3. Vynnyky-Lysivka, Lviv region. Distribution of burnt daub in the trenches from 2016–2019: a – burnt daub; b – sandstone; c – petrified wood; d – post-holes; e – humus; f – grey sediment; g – dark grey sediment; h – sand; i – level of sandstone; j – bedrock. After Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, ryc. 5; modified

Ryc. 3. Winniki-Lisiwka, rejon lwowski. Rozmieszczenie polepy w wykopach z lat 2016–2019: a – polepa; b – piaskowiec; c – ska- 
mieniałe drewno; d – dołki posłupowe; e – humus; f – szary sedyment; g – ciemnoszary sedyment; h – piasek; i – poziom 
piaskowca; j – całeć. Wg Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, ryc. 5; ze zmianami
Fig. 4. Vynnyky-Lysivka, Lviv region. An example of burnt daub. After Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, fot. 7

Fig. 5. Vynnyky-Lysivka, Lviv region. Distribution of pottery around burnt daub in the trenches from 2016–2019: a – 20–60 cm depth; b – 40–60 cm depth. After Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, ryc. 14; 16
Fig. 6. Vynnyky-Lysivka, L'viv region. Distribution of flint artifacts around burnt daub in the trenches from 2016–2019. After Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, ryc. 15

PHASE CII OF THE TRIPOLYE CULTURE: GORDINEŞTI II-STÎNCA GOALĂ

As a result of the 2016–2021 archaeological excavations in Gordionesti II-Stînca goală in northern Moldova, three houses of the Tripolye Culture were unearthed (Fig. 7; Sirbu, Król 2021), dated to the period around 3300/3250–3000/2900 BC (Król, Rybicka 2022, 21). All the structures represent the Gordionesti group of this culture.

The site of Gordionesti II-Stînca goală is located in the Moldavian Plateau. It is situated on a very exposed limestone terrain hump, surrounded on three sides by the Racovăţ River valley. At present, the relative height between the culmination and the bottom of the valley reaches a few tens of metres (Fig. 7).

The first of the identified dwellings was located near the earlier archaeological trenches by V. Dergachev (Dergachev 1973; 1980). The house was unearthed near the southern edge of the stone headland (Fig. 7). The discovery was inspired by the recording of pottery sherds and lumps of daub on the surface. In the archaeological trench, researchers identified numerous vessel fragments, flint artefacts, and clusters of daub (Sirbu et al. 2019; Sirbu, Król 2021). As noted by G. Sirbu and D. Król (2021, 102), in most cases it is difficult to reconstruct the form and/or function of prehistoric buildings due to their partial state of preservation. However, analysing the distribution of archaeological finds, it was concluded that the residential structure probably had a rectangular shape, and was oriented along the NE-SW axis. The dwelling consisted of two functionally different rooms (Fig. 8). One of the chambers, measuring about 5.6×5.8 m, was probably a residential space with numerous faunal remains. The other room, measuring 5.6×5.4 m, had a residential and economic function. Within the second room and in its surroundings most of the daily household activities were performed (Fig. 9; numerous spindle whorls and loom weights, axes and chisels, flint production waste). In the south-eastern corner of this part of the house and in the area east to the dwelling, researchers uncovered a concentration of tableware fragments (Fig. 8; Sirbu, Król 2021, Fig. 2; 3b). The distribution of archaeological finds outside this room marks the economic zone. The area situated east and north of the dwelling was particularly intensively utilised. The vicinity of the house lacks additional sunken features of economic nature only (Przybyła et al. 2017; Sirbu, Król 2021). Nevertheless, the described residential structure and its surroundings meet the definition of a household cluster (Grygiel 1986; Pelisiak 2003).

On the other hand, the state of preservation of the described structure makes it difficult to unequivocally assess the type of its construction. Taking into account the discovery of postholes and pieces of daub with wattle imprints (Figs. 8–9; Sirbu, Król 2021, Fig. 2; 4), we can suspect that the construction of the house was lightweight. The framework of the structure was formed by posts, while walls were constructed of wattle daubed with clay. Similar features characterise also the remaining two dwellings (Fig. 7).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the scope of the research, we identified remnants of houses of lightweight constructions, regarding the FBC, represented on the Vynnyky-Lysivka in eastern Roztocze region, as well as the stage CII Tripolye culture, as exhibited by Gordionesti II-Stînca goală in northern Moldova.

Dwellings, whose remnants consist of clusters of daub, are typical for FBC not only in the area of western Ukraine (Rybicka, Hawinskyj, Pasterkiewicz 2019; Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021), but also its eastern (Papiernik, Rybicka 2002; Pelisiak 2003; Rzepcki 2014) and south-eastern (Gumiński 1989) groups. However, in the case of the residential structures from Gródek (Gumiński 1989), Rudnyky (Konopla, Gavins’kij 2013), and Lezhnytsya (Rybicka, Hawinskyj, Pasterkiewicz 2019), the exact type of construction cannot be unequivocally assessed. The house from the Vynnyky-Lysivka site is currently the only published such feature whose exacts construction method can be described in detail. Based on the features of the unearthed structure, we can conclude that the identified clusters of daub are remains of a building of a lightweight construction, analogous to those recorded in the eastern group of the FBC (Papiernik, Rybicka 2002). At the same time, the residential structure from the site of Vynnyky-Lysivka clearly differs from dwellings typical for the Tripolye Culture (Videjk 2013; Chernovol 2021, 49–51), such as, for example, houses of the Nebelovska (Videjk, Burdo 2015) and Brzinzeni groups (Markevich 1981). Dwellings of the latter culture were made using a different technology, with large amounts of clay, and had a solid, permanent character (Chernovol 2021, Figs. 2–5). In addition, the internal layout of houses was carefully planned, and different parts of the interior had specific utilitarian functions (Markevich 1981; Chernovol 2021, 63–65). No such strict rules were identified when it comes to residential structures of the FBC (Papiernik, Rybicka 2002, Ryc. 14; Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, 58–61).
Fig. 7. Gordinești II-Stînca goală, Edinet region: a – location of the site; b – location of trenches with the remains of houses. After Król, Rybicka 2022, Figs. 2c; 3

Ryc. 7. Gordinești II-Stinca goala, rejon jedyniecki: a – lokalizacja stanowiska; b – lokalizacja wykopów z pozostałościami domostw. Wg Król, Rybicka 2022, ryc. 2c; 3
Fig. 8. Gordinești II-Stînca goală, Edinet region. Plan of a house 1. After Sîrbu, Król 2021, Fig. 2; modified
Ryc. 8. Gordinești II-Stinca goală, rejon jedyniecki. Plan domostwa 1. Wg Sîrbu, Król 2021, Fig. 2; ze zmianami

Fig. 9. Gordinești II-Stînca goală, Edinet region. Distribution of the inventoried pieces. After Sîrbu, Król 2021, Fig. 6, modified
Ryc. 9. Gordinești II-Stinca goală, rejon jedyniecki. Rozmieszczenie zabytków. Wg Sîrbu, Król 2021, Fig. 6, ze zmianami
As observed by Dmytro Chernovol (2021, 63–65), the Tripolye Culture residential structures often were accompanied by smaller buildings of different economic functions, which were located in their vicinity. Near the described dwelling from the site of Vynnyky-Lysivka, there was a smaller post construction whose exact function is difficult to determine. Since it seems that the structure did not serve a residential function, we can assume that it served rather economic purposes.

The observations discussed above show the FBC dwelling from the Vynnyky-Lysivka site was not an imitation of the form and internal layout of dwellings of the Tripolye Culture. In the book “Tripolye Culture – Funnel Beaker Culture. The intensity of contacts and their chronology”, M. Rybicka asked a question whether the presence of numerous imports of Tripolye pottery in the FBC milieu could be associated with adaptation of other foreign features by the latter communities (Rybicka 2017). Due to the location of the FBC settlement at Vynnyky-Lysivka site in relatively close proximity to ecumene of the Tripolye Culture, as well as the presence of numerous pottery sherds of the latter cultural phenomenon in the ceramic collection from the site (Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, 34–35), it seemed that the settlement should have been treated as a good marker for tracing the processes of adaptation of further eastern elements. However, the close contacts between the two communities did not result in changes in the manner of construction and interior organisation of houses.

The Gordinişti II-Stînca goală settlement, dated to the period around 3300/3250–3000/2900 BC (Król, Rybicka 2022, 21), is located in the zone previously occupied by communities of the Brînzeni group of the Tripolye Culture (Sirbu, Król, Heghea 2020). The people associated with the latter cultural group built stable houses of the so-called “ploshchadka” type (Markевич 1981, 33; Sirbu, Król, Heghea 2020; Figs. 2–5). According to research conducted at the Gordinişti II-Stînca goală site, dwellings of the Gordinişti group were of different construction. Regarding the residential structures, it can now be suggested that there is no direct continuation of the rules used by the communities of the Brînzeni group in the Gordinişti group. A common element of houses of these two different communities is the division of the interior into parts used in various ways G. Sirbu and D. Król (2021, 104) described the character of remains of residential structures from the site of Gordinişti as reduced “ploshchadkas”. Considering, among other things, the hypotheses of V. Dergachev (Dergachev 1980), the researchers concluded that the “degradation” of the form of the house typical for the earlier stages of the Tripolye Culture was likely the result of broader processes taking place in the late 4th century BC in the area of the Eastern Carpathians. This observation is consistent with the writings of Y. Rassamakin (2013) about the gradual decline of agrarian societies. These processes may have arisen from socio-economic changes influenced by climatic or cultural-political factors. As noted by G. Sirbu and D. Król (2021, 104), in the discussed period we could be dealing with depletion of agricultural land which may have forced frequent relocation of settlements. There may also have been a change in the farming system to one in which larger areas needed to be exploited. The communities of the eastern and south-eastern groups of the FBC practiced the slash-and-burn agriculture (Kruk 1980; Kruk, Milisauskas 1999; Rybicka 2004), well documented by the analysis of the laminated sediments of Lake Gościąż (Peliśiak, Rybicka 2021). This type of agricultural system requires relatively short-lived settlements (e.g. Papiernik, Rybicka 2002; Peliśiak 2003; Rybicka 2004; Rzepcki 2014) with houses of lightweight constructions, analogous to those discovered at the site Vynnyky-Lysivka (Hawinskyj, Rybicka 2021, Fig. 5). Sadly, no conclusive data (e.g. palynological) has been published so far regarding the economy of the FBC communities from western Ukraine and the people of the Gordinişti group of the Tripolye Culture. For that reason, we are not able to describe in detail the features of the natural environment in these regions. What is more, it is not possible to assess the extent to which these changes were influenced by anthropogenic impact – the activity of populations of the earlier Brînzeni group in the case of northern Moldova, and the settlement of the FBC in the eastern Roztocze region.

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