

Three Narratives Surrounding the Cluj Tobacco Factory

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Between 1855 and 1860, three buildings erected in a peripheral area of Cluj¹ were to be considered the first modern industrial buildings in the city.² (Fig. 1) These buildings were to house the Cluj Tobacco Factory [*Dobânygyár*] for about 100 years. This factory was among the five largest in Hungary, and between 1890 and 1910, it already had approximately 1300 employees.³ It continued its activity during the Communist regime until 1960, when tobacco production was transferred to Timișoara,⁴ another city with a long tradition in this industry; thus, beginning with 1962, the buildings were taken over by the “Someșul” Knitwear Factory [*Fabrica de Tricotaje “Someșul”*].⁵ The industrial complex was demolished in 2007, being replaced by office buildings.⁶ Meanwhile, the apartment house on 16 Gheorghe Șincai St., where the factory’s employees dwelt, is still in use, wearing the indelible marks of many moments of modern industrialization.

First Narrative: The Tobacco Industry and the Governments

1851 is the year in which the Austrian government established the state monopoly on the manufacture and sale of tobacco products, which, in addition to generating profits for the state and controlling tobacco smuggling, catalyzed *industrial development*.⁷ The tobacco industry’s monopoly proved to be a visionary initiative. In fact, it was so lucrative that, in the case of Cluj, it fed the treasuries of four successive political administrations, as follows.

Tobacco factories were the driving force behind Hungary’s industrialization policy after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. Although towards the end of the 1860s there was a desire to abolish this reminder of the Austrian neo-absolutist period, the tobacco monopoly proved

1 Cluj (Cluj-Napoca after October 16, 1974), in Hungarian *Kolozsvár*, in German *Klausenburg*, is a Romanian city, located in the heart of Transylvania. It has a tradition of being a university city. Between 1790 and 1848 and, respectively, between 1861 and 1867, it was the capital of the Grand Principality of Transylvania. Before World War I it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and since 1 December 1918 it became part of Greater Romania (the name given to the Kingdom of Romania during the interwar period).

2 György Gaal, *Magyarok utcája: A Kolozsvári egykori Bel- és Külmagyar utcák telkei, házai, lakói* [Hungarian Street: Plots, Houses, and Residents of the Former Inner and Outer Hungarian Street of Cluj] (Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 1995), 131-33.

3 Gaal, *Magyarok utcája*, 132.

4 In Hungarian, *Temesvár*; in German, *Temeswar*.

5 Ștefan Pascu, coord. *Istoria Clujului* [The History of Cluj] (Cluj: Consiliul Popular al Municipiului Cluj, 1974), 390, 458, 464.

6 Vasile Mitrea, “Problematica patrimoniului arhitectural urbanistic” [The Matter of the Urban Architectural Heritage], in *Cluj-Napoca în proiecte: 50 de ani 1960-2010* [Cluj-Napoca in Projects: 50 years 1960-2010], eds. Vasile Mitrea, Emanoil Tudose, Aurelian Buzuloiu, Eugeniu Pănescu (Cluj-Napoca: Imprimeria Ardealul, 2011), 209, 212.

7 Alexandra Ghiț, “State Labour Control and Women’s Resistance in Austro-Hungarian Transylvania Tobacco Manufacturing (1897–1918),” in *Tobacco in Global Perspective, 1780–1960: Trade, Knowledge and Labour*, eds. Alexander van Wickeren, Jean Stubbs, William Gervase Clarence-Smith (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-64411-5_11, 285-314.

particularly profitable. So much so that, in 1882, a dedicated institution was established: the Royal Hungarian Tobacco Monopoly Central Directorate [*Magyar Királyi Dohányjövédéki Központi Igazgatóság*], subordinated to the Hungarian Ministry of Finance. The Statistical Yearbook for 1898 shows that the profit brought by the tobacco industry was 59,134,000 crowns – more than 60% of the income.⁸

After 1918, Cluj became part of the Kingdom of Romania, and the factory was absorbed by the Romanian State Monopolies Régie [*Regia Monopolurilor Statului*],⁹ which was subordinated to the Ministry of Finance. Thus, even though the new Greater Romania put in place “nostrification” initiatives in Transylvania¹⁰ – some of which focused on welfare policies and organizations –, the Romanian government was still able to draw on existing structures.¹¹ In 1929, the State Monopolies Régie was renamed as the Autonomous House of the Monopolies of the Romanian Kingdom [*Casa Autonomă a Monopolurilor Regatului României*], which functioned until the proclamation of the Romanian People’s Republic in 1948.¹² The Autonomous House of State Monopolies [*Casa Autonomă a Monopolurilor de Stat (CAM)*] was in charge of the factory between 1948 and 1959. During the late 1950s and the early 1960s, along with other State institutions, the Autonomous House of State Monopolies was reorganized into different structures called Directorates, including the General Directorate of the Tobacco Industry [*Direcția Generală a Industriei Tutunului*].¹³ The Communist Regime was the last to profit from the exclusive control of the production and sale of tobacco, following this historic pattern.

Second Narrative: The Tobacco Factory and the City

The historical censuses of Cluj’s population record a significant increase during the second half of the 19th century, respectively at the beginning of the 20th century, when the city almost quadrupled its population, thus confirming the social, economic, and industrial momentum that characterized it during the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Consequently, in 1850, the population was 16,886; in 1890, it rose to 37,957; and in 1910, it reached 60,808.¹⁴

At the end of the 19th century, the employees of the Royal Hungarian Tobacco Factory in Cluj [*Magyar Királyi Dohánygyár*] represented almost 3,5% of the city’s population – making the factory the largest state-owned employer of the time.¹⁵ Consequently, the “life” of the factory – the life of its *employees* – flooded the society of the time with events, news, protests, speeches, characters, and even an assassination attempt. For example, in 1897, a strike lasting over a week led to the director’s dismissal, and the employees secured additional benefits, including the establishment of a library, a cafeteria, and a crèche (becoming the only factory in Hungary to have all three amenities). This incident was picked up by the press of the time.¹⁶

8 Ghiț, “State Labour Control and Women’s Resistance.”

9 In Romania, the State Monopolies Régie [*Regia Monopolurilor Statului*] was created in the second half of the 19th century. Thus, the exploitation of salt quarries, the production and sale of tobacco and matches, as well as the production and sale of narcotics were a monopoly owned and operated by the State.

10 At the state level, a comprehensive set of policies was implemented in order to appropriate infrastructures, institutions, procedures, the workforce, and even elites. See in full Alexandra Ghiț, “Gendered Work, Skill, and Women’s Labor Activism in Romanian Tobacco Factories from the 1920s to the 1960s,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 104 (2023): 11–31, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0147547923000212>.

11 Ghiț, “State Labour Control and Women’s Resistance.”

12 This does not take into account the short period of the Hungarian occupation of Northern Transylvania, 1940–1944, when, following the Second Vienna Award, the factory was again administered by the Hungarian Tobacco Monopoly Authority [*Magyar Királyi Dohányjövédék*].

13 The Régie of State Monopolies was re-established only after 1990, in accordance with special laws that were successively adopted by the post-Communist Romanian Parliament – Law No. 31 (May 6, 1996).

14 Victor Lazăr, *Clujul* (Bucharest: Cvltura Națională, 1923), 29–30.

15 Gaal, *Magyarok utcája*, 132.

16 Ghiț, “State Labour Control and Women’s Resistance”; Gaal, *Magyarok utcája*, 132.



Fig. 1: The historic building of the Tobacco Factory in Cluj, ca. 1900

It is notable that in 1921, the first Romanian census recorded 83,542 inhabitants in Cluj (with the Romanian population contributing significantly and almost tripling), and in 1923, a new census recorded 110,000 people (including the army and servants).¹⁷

In 1924, 1360 workers were recorded as employed by the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory [*Fabrica de tutun și țigărete*]¹⁸ in Cluj, according to a local newspaper.¹⁹ During this time, a significant glimpse into the life of factory workers in Cluj is given by a four-page newspaper called *Solidarity: Journal of the Workingmen and Workingwomen of the Tobacco Manufactories and Matches Factories* [*Solidaritatea: Organul lucrătorilor și lucrătoarelor dela manufacturile de tutun și fabricile de chibrituri*].²⁰ A crucial moment occurred in 1925-1930, when new machinery was introduced at the factory in Cluj, leading to a notable drop in the number of workers.²¹

Following 1948, forced industrialization was the means by which Communism took root in Romania. Industry became an end in itself, with serious effects on cities and the environment. Thousands of people were relocated to pursue an urban life. In fact, as a result of this industrialization process, between the 1950s and 1980s, the urban population of Romania tripled, through a process of (imposed) migration from the countryside to the city: from 3,486,995 in 1948 (22.0 % of the total population), to 5,667,559 in 1965 (29.8 % of the total population), and finally up to 11,540,494 in 1985 (50.6 % of the total population).²² Towards the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, the Communist Party started the extensive program of collective housing. The central areas of the cities and/or the main urban routes were targeted first; yet, along with them, the peripheries of the historical cities were undergoing a redefining process.²³

In this context, the Cluj Cigarettes Factory [*Fabrica de Țigarete din Cluj*] had to adapt once more. The worker's profile was bound to change, as specific skill-training initiatives were implemented during the 1950s. However, during the mid-1950s, the records sent a mixed signal: out

17 Lazăr, *Clujul*, 29-30.

18 Octavian Buzea, *Clujul: 1919-1939* [Cluj: 1919-1939] (Cluj: Tipografia "Ardealul," 1939), 82, 90, 120, 214, 215. Also known as "the Tobacco Ghîț," see Petru Borteș, *Călăuza orașului Cluj: Partea I-a • Ediția III-a* [Cluj Companion: Part 1 • 3rd edition] (Cluj: Tipografia Națională S.A., 1937), 30.

19 *Înfrățirea* no. 995 (January 26, 1924): 1-4.

20 The newspaper was edited by Fracisc Bruder and Nicolae Muntean; it had eight issues published between 1928 and 1929. See Alexandra Ghîț, "Re-reading local sources: Finding gendered trade unionism in a Transylvanian factory newspaper," *Zarah* (November 11, 2020), https://zarah-ceu.org/re-reading-local-sources-finding-gendered-trade-unionism-in-a-transylvanian-factory-newspaper/#_ftn1.

21 Ghîț, "Gendered Work, Skill, and Women's Labor Activism," 18.

22 Dinu C. Giurescu, *The Razing of Romania's Past* (World Monuments Fund, US/ICOMOS, 1989), 2-3.

23 Giurescu, *The Razing of Romania's Past*, 5, 38-40; Ana-Maria Zahariade, *Arhitectura în proiectul comunist. România 1944-1989 / Architecture in the Communist Project. Romania 1944-1989* (Bucharest: Simetria, 2011), 18-19, 74-75, 91.



Fig. 2: The east façade on Gheorghe Şincai Street

of the 46 employees identified as production leaders, 28 had been hired in the 1920s and 4 in the 1930s. This shows that the factory's workforce in Cluj maintained strong continuity, while significant changes occurred in the organization of production. Nonetheless, by 1956, the total number of employees dropped to 437.²⁴

²⁴ Ghîț, "Gendered Work, Skill, and Women's Labor Activism," 24.

Third Narrative: The Tobacco Factory and the Employee Housing

In 1921, the State Monopolies Régie bought a building (Fig. 2) through a purchase-and-sale agreement from its private owners – a fate it would share with the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory itself (changing owners, with workers coming and going) for about 40 years.²⁵ It was one of two revenue buildings acquired during this period to serve as employee housing for the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory in the city.²⁶ The concern to provide housing specifically intended for the employees of the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory, as part of the State Monopolies Régie, was linked to a broader policy of implementing the Romanian administration in Transylvania.²⁷ However, at the local level, this decision is clearly motivated by a significant population growth and by the building stock resulting from legislative provisions following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

The case study is represented by the private rental building located at number 16 on Gheorghe Șincai Street (formerly Paris Street [in Hungarian: *Párizsi ut*] and subsequently Hegedüs Sándor Street [in Hungarian: *Hegedüs Sándor utca*]). Commissioned by Dr. Elek Hints de Farkaslak (1861-1919), from Târgu Mureș (in Hungarian *Marosvásárhely*), it was erected between 1904 and 1907²⁸ and was part of a series of large urban interventions, which began to define the streets of the city, starting with the end of the 19th century; they created a *fin de siècle* atmosphere, which emanated from Budapest and was specific to the cultural-artistic ambience maintained by the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy.²⁹

Before World War I (Fig. 3), the building was designed to accommodate eight bourgeois apartments, two on each floor, while the semibasement floor hosted the porter/caretaker's apartment and other amenities, as follows: two servants' staircases, each communicating with a communal laundry room, and individual coal/firewood storage rooms corresponding to the above-ground apartments. The access to the porter/caretaker's apartment was straight from the inner courtyard. There was also a servants' toilet on the semibasement floor, while the porter/caretaker's apartment lacked sanitary facilities. All apartments had a main bathroom with a toilet and a hot water boiler. Separately, there was also a servant's toilet. Each apartment had a main entrance leading to the vestibule and to a service hallway. This hallway was also used as a service area between the dining room and the kitchen; the coal/firewood freight elevator was also located here.

During the interwar period, the building began to be used as employee housing for the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory. As the city's population grew, densification was visible across the entire city of Cluj. Consequent alterations were implemented in this building as well, to accommodate more people. The new tenants mirrored the city's (new) social structure. Consequently, some of the apartments were subdivided; in the 1940s, 10 to 14 families were confirmed to have lived in the building.³⁰ The laundry room located in the southern wing was also transformed into a small apartment. (Fig. 4) The plans from this period reveal that the dwellings on the semibasement level (lacking a private bathroom or toilet) and those on the uppermost level (lacking a bathtub and a hot-water boiler) were the most modest. On the ground floor, a new "one-room apartment" was created, adjacent to the entrance, equipped only with a washbasin (this apartment used the shared toilet on the semibasement level). Thus, instead of the initial 8 + 1 apartments, there were now 12 + 2 more on the semibasement level. Only some of the

25 Cluj-Napoca Cadastre and Land Registration Office, Land registry extract no. 2387.

26 The other building, that had a similar history, is located at number 40, on Iuliu Maniu Street.

27 Ghiț, "State Labour Control and Women's Resistance."

28 Archive of the "Compania de Apă Someș S.A." [Someș Water Company], Dossier no. 597 [3030/02.04.1942].

29 For the architectural and artistic context of Cluj during that period, see in full Gheorghe Vais, *Clujul eclectic: programe de arhitectură în perioada dualistă (1867-1918)* [Eclectic Cluj: Building Types During the Dualist Era (1867-1918)] (Cluj-Napoca: U.T. Press, 2009).

30 Archive of the "Compania de Apă Someș S.A.," Dossier No. 597.

flats kept the niche for the maid. Some of the separations between apartments were superficial, strictly formal: the apartments had separate numbers, yet certain rooms communicated freely, as they were occupied by related families – a fact evidenced by the tenants' names.³¹ Only four apartments retained their initial layout.

In the 1950s, after the proclamation of the Romanian People's Republic, the apartments were redistributed to the employees of the Cluj Cigarettes Factory. Although the number of Tobacco Factory's employees decreased dramatically during the mid-1950s (as previously shown), the city's population grew; despite the Party's extensive housing program, the shortage outpaced the supply. Therefore, this type of communal housing arrangement became a common practice.³² Based on reconstitutions, in 1959, 26 tenant families (1 to 6 individuals each) resided in the building in one-room apartments (11 apartments), or two-room apartments (15 apartments), totaling approximately 76 people. (Fig. 5) These housing units were allocated to various categories of employees, ranging from chief accountants to ordinary workers, thus reflecting a social and ethnic mix.

However, as the Cluj Cigarettes Factory entered a period of decline, the building changed hands several times, as did the factory itself. Finally, after 1959, it ended up being managed by the Group of Municipal and Housing Enterprises of Cluj County [*Grupul Întreprinderilor de Gospodărire Comunală și Locativă al Județului Cluj (GIGCL Cluj)*], through the Cluj Housing and Premises Enterprise [*Întreprinderea de locuințe și localuri Cluj (ILLC)*].³³

Facts Beyond the Three Narratives

At the beginning of the 1960s, the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory in Cluj was rapidly losing its clients, while its machines were by now too old. At the same time, the Party's policy targeted other types of goods with better export markets – hence the decision that the “Someșul” Knitwear Factory would take over the buildings previously used by the Tobacco and Cigarettes Factory, and even some of its employees.³⁴ Concomitantly, the city's population continued to increase between 1966 and 1989, from 185,663 to 318,147, of which 106,000 were mainly migrants from the countryside, while the natural increase was only 26,484.³⁵

31 For the period of the Hungarian occupation of Northern Transylvania, the building was administered by the Hungarian Tobacco Monopoly Authority, Cluj-Napoca Cadastre and Land Registration Office, Land registry extract no. 2387; for the year 1943, the work of Ödön Boga, *Kolozsvári lak- és címjegyzék* (Kolozsvár: Minerva, 1943), documents the situation of the tenants and their occupations: page 218 (*Boga György, dr. titkár* - Dr. György Boga, secretary), page 239 (*Császár Bálint, dr. aljegyző* - Dr. Bálint Császár, deputy secretary; *Császár Sámuel, dr. p. ü. tanácsos* - Dr. Sámuel Császár, financial counsellor), page 288 (*Fodor Miklós, kapus* - Miklós Fodor, porter/caretaker), page 365 (*Karsai Sándor, műszerész* - Sándor Karsai, mechanic), page 411 (*Kriza Jánosné, dr. tisztv.* - Dr. Jánosné Kriza [wife of János Kriza], clerk), page 432 (*Löcsey László, főnök* - László Löcsey, head; *Löcsey Sándor, tisztv.* - Sándor Löcsey, clerk), page 456 (*Mezei Béla, tisztv.* - Béla Mezei, clerk), page 626 (*Zsák Frigyes, gy. ügyelő* - Frigyes Zsák, inspector).

32 A clear connection can be made with the state-owned public housing model of the Soviet “communal apartment” – *kommunal'naya kvartira*, commonly known as *kommunalka*. See also Henry W. Morton, “Housing in the Soviet Union,” *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 35, no. 3 (1984): 69-80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1174118>.

33 A lot of details, specific to the bureaucracy of those times, can be analysed in the Archive of the Property and Cadaster Evidence Service, Cluj-Napoca City Hall [Arhiva Serviciului de Evidență patrimoniu și cadastru din Primăria Cluj-Napoca], Dossier no. 3039 “Fabrica de Țigarete Cluj.” GIGCL Cluj ceased its activity by Decision no. 510 (November 16, 1990), following the establishment of autonomous administrations and commercial companies as a result of “the division of the units of the Group of Municipal and Housing Enterprises of Cluj County and the closure of communal household services organized under the direct subordination of municipal and town halls.” (quoted from the document, our translation). Most of the apartments in the buildings managed by the former GIGCL Cluj were sold to their former tenants, in accordance with the post-revolutionary legal provisions.

34 Ghiț, “Gendered Work, Skill, and Women's Labor Activism,” 26.

35 Vasile Mitrea, “Locuirea. De la plombe la marile ansambluri” [Housing. From Infill Buildings to Large Residential Ensembles], in *Cluj-Napoca în proiecte: 50 de ani 1960-2010* [Cluj-Napoca in Projects: 50

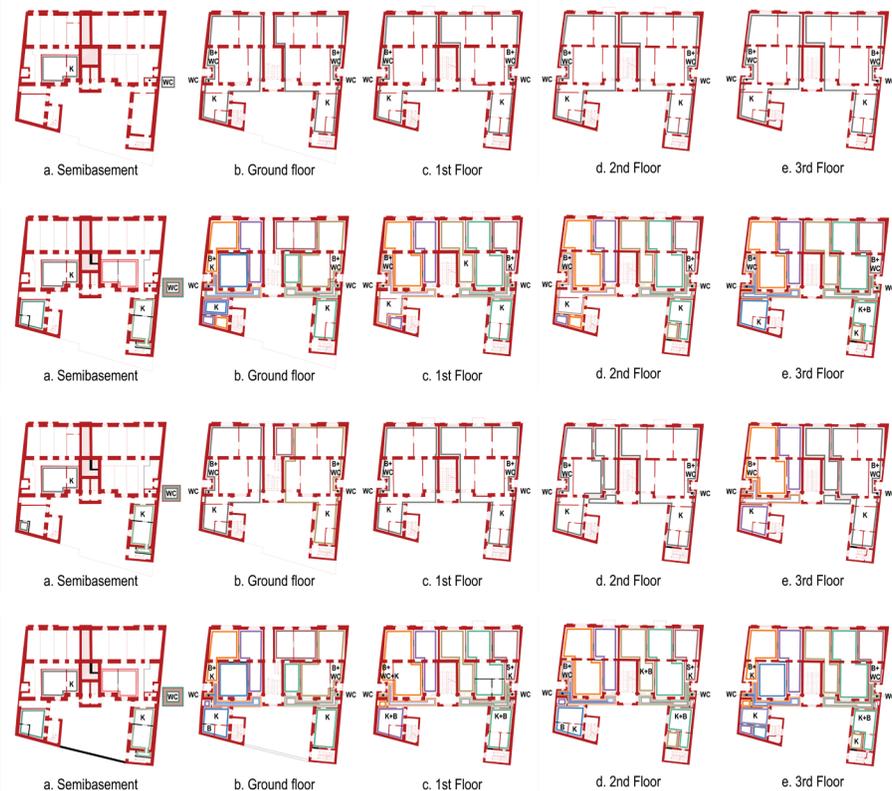


Fig. 3-6: The initial plans of the building, ca. 1907; during the interwar period; ca. 1959; during the 1970s
 Legend: WC - toilet, B - bathtub, S - shower, K - kitchen, — limit of an apartment

As for the building, by the mid-1960s, other social categories began to occupy it: intellectuals, doctors, military personnel, and employees of various state institutions. Some of them resided there for 2-3 generations. Our reconstitutions show that, in the 1970s, 27 tenant families (1 to 6 persons) lived in the building in one-room apartments (13 apartments) or two-room apartments (14 apartments), totaling approximately 90 people. Thus, the building reached its highest density. (Fig. 6, Table 1)

| HISTORICAL PERIOD | NUMBER OF PERSONS | NUMBER OF APARTMENTS | NET BUILDING AREA / PERSON | NUMBER OF ROOMS / PERSON** |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| CIRCA 1907 | CIRCA 30-40 | 9 | 41 SQM / PERS | 29/40 = 0.72 |
| INTERWAR PERIOD | CIRCA 40-50 | 14 | 32.8 SQM/PERSON | 38/50 = 0.76 |
| 1959 | 76 | 26 | 21.57 SQM/PERSON | 41/76 = 0.54 |
| 1970S | 90 | 27 | 18.22 SQM/PERSON | 41/90 = 0.45 |

* Four apartments are now used as office spaces; therefore, for each of them we have calculated one person, in accordance with the method used for collecting building utility charges.
 ** The number of rooms varies because, over time, several categories of spaces were successively reconverted (e.g. hallways became rooms, kitchens became rooms, hallways became kitchens).

Table 1: Building occupation throughout time

years 1960-2010], eds. Vasile Mitrea, Emanoil Tudose, Aurelian Buzuloiu, Eugeniu Pănescu (Cluj-Napoca: Imprimeria Ardealul, 2011), 156 and Norbert Petrovici, *Zona urbană. O economie politică a socialismului românesc* [The Urban Area. A Political Economy of Romanian Socialism] (Cluj-Napoca: Tact, 2017), 143.

Today, the building still shows the scars left by its history, old and recent, all along. Its legal status changed in the 1990s, and former tenants were granted the ability to purchase the apartments they occupied. But the building has not fully recovered to its initial configuration. Currently, of the 18 existing apartments, only four have returned to their original state and surface, while two apartments still use certain utilities in common, and another four share common spaces. Notably, only seven are occupied by the owners themselves (families of 1 to 4 people); the others are rented or used as office spaces. The last family of former employees of the Cluj Tobacco Factory moved out of the building in 2023, after 67 years of residing there.

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Fig. 2: Photo by the authors.

Fig. 3, 4, 5, 6: Authors' reconstitutions.