

RUINED AND ABANDONED TRADITIONAL SETTLEMENTS. THE CASE OF CYPRUS

Maria Philokyprou¹, Evi Fiouri², Elena Limbouri-Kozakou³

ABSTRACT

A large number of traditional settlements are being abandoned today mainly due to the social changes as well as other factors – political, physical, etc. The abandonment of traditional settlements which affects their social and use values is not a recent phenomenon in Cyprus. The essence of these settlements depends not only on the fabric of buildings (architectural, historical, environmental values), but also on the ways in which they were used and the traditions and intangible associations attached to them. In this paper three case studies of abandoned villages on the island are presented with a close investigation of the common as well as the different reasons for their abandonment. The great challenge that governments, planners, communities, architects and restorers have to face is the way in which these settlements will regain their previous life and prosperity.

Keywords: *Ruin, Abandoned, Revival, Community participation, Traditional settlements*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. General information

The traditional settlements have always constituted a very important part of the cultural heritage of every country. Unfortunately, several settlements with a long history and rich architecture have been gradually abandoned. These examples, which were always the most "alive sites" and evolved in relation to the historic, economic, social, and cultural developments, can no longer follow recent progress. This paper deals with the concerns related to the current attempts at the revival, reuse, and rational management of abandoned traditional settlements on the island of Cyprus by establishing specific goals and strategies that can generally help the sustainable development of the architectural heritage.

The aesthetic, social, historical, environmental and architectural value of these settlements is very important. Every simple traditional village is unique. It is a harmonious and successful combination of natural and built environment, offering high-quality architecture in close relation with the physical environment and the site itself. Traditional settlements are examples of unique urban setting and architectural creation. The architecture of these settlements is a living and invaluable testimony to the historic memory of each place. The aesthetic value is inextricably linked to their authenticity. Their essence depends not only on the fabric of buildings, structures and spaces, but also on the ways in which they were used and appreciated, and the traditions and intangible associations attached to them (Icomos Charter on the built Vernacular heritage –1999). Their social form and close connection to the primary occupations [1] constitute a characteristic of utmost importance. In addition, the vernacular settlements are by definition sustainable, incorporating many environmentally-friendly features [2, 3].

1.2. Threats and causes of abandonment of the traditional settlements. Diachronical and current situation in Cyprus

Throughout the ages many traditional settlements, have undergone some serious threats. Their survival has been endangered by economic (unsatisfactory primary production, geographical isolation), social

¹ Dr. Maria Philokyprou, Lecturer, Department of Architecture, University of Cyprus, mphiloky@ucy.ac.cy

² Mrs Evi Fouri, Archaeological Officer, Department of Antiquities, efiouri@da.mcw.gov.cy

³ Dr. Elena Limbouri-Kozakou, Independent Researcher, e.limbouri@gmail.com

(urbanization) cultural, political as well as natural forces (earthquake disasters, land instability). Due to these factors, they became extremely vulnerable, facing serious problems of obsolescence and neglect. The lack of maintenance progressively led to the collapse of small or large parts thereof, and the gradual disappearance of valuable data. On the other hand, this abandonment led to the intact preservation of some original forms, elements, and structures. Therefore, the abandoned traditional villages are the most authentic testimony to the previous urban fabric and a virgin ground for action. The abandonment of rural settlements in Cyprus is not a recent phenomenon. During the 15th and 16th centuries, one in five settlements was abandoned mainly due to the colonialist policy of Venice, which favored the growing of more profitable commodities like cotton, a product that could not easily be grown on the island. Thus, numerous villages were abandoned, especially the smaller ones. The phenomenon increased during the Ottoman rule of the island (1571-1878), when 200 villages are reported to have been abandoned, mainly due to the repeated attacks of plague. Other reasons of abandonment during this period were incompetent and corrupted administrations and heavy and arbitrary taxes. For example, the tax on wine caused the desertion of several mountain villages whose economy was based on viticulture. The population of these villages moved to more fertile and irrigated lands which offered opportunities for other cultivations and commercial exchanges [4]. A new and significant factor initiated in 1960 and intensified in the years that followed was the switch from an agricultural economy to an economy of tourism, industry and services. This resulted in an intense urbanization, which had a devastating impact on the countryside. In 1974, hundreds of villages were abandoned by their inhabitants as a result of the Turkish invasion, and the forced exchange of populations between the south and north of the island. Some of the abandoned villages were occupied by new inhabitants that were forced to move to these areas. This abnormal situation continues in present times, resulting in the slow deterioration and abandonment of at least one hundred settlements. The industrial revolution and the urbanization of the island that were also observed in the rest of the European countries, led gradually to a change of attitude towards vernacular architecture. The relationship between people and the traditional environment that was noted during previous periods was discontinued since the new lifestyle created new requirements. A romantic nostalgia of the past replaced the traditional continuity between the past and the present which lasted in various forms from the origin of civilization until the end of the 18th century. The major recent development of tourism combined with the globalization of the contemporary periods resulted in a sharp turn towards the architecture of the past and to the overestimating of its value since this is part of the identity and individuality of each country. In Cyprus, since 1936, the most important parts of the cultural heritage can be declared ancient monuments by the Antiquities Law. More recently, according to article 38 of the Town and Country Planning Law (enacted in 1972 and activated in 1990), any building, group of buildings or area with special architectural, social or historic interest and also any physical manifestation of heritage can be included in conservation orders and be protected from any alteration to its original character and aesthetic value. Despite the fact that according to the above-mentioned legislation, entire areas can be protected, this law was mainly applied to individual buildings and not settlement areas as a whole. A small number of settlements were studied in detail by a government initiative and only individual vernacular buildings of these settlements were declared listed buildings or ancient monuments. The specific legal system with regard to preservation seems to be rather slow in responding to the new and compelling threats. An additional reason for the delay in implementing preservation legislation was probably related to the lack of public awareness of this issue. In this paper, the specific reasons that led to the neglect of some specific villages of Cyprus are investigated in order to suggest measures and strategies that could be followed in order to ensure their revival and rehabilitation, comparing them with other similar examples in other countries. The investigation includes an example of a very attractive settlement that was recently abandoned and for which the Government took actions towards its preservation and revival. This constitutes the only settlement declared as an ancient monument as a whole thus ensuring its protection. The investigation also involves two examples of abandoned villages that may be included in the future plans of the State.

2. CASE STUDIES OF ABANDONED SETTLEMENTS IN CYPRUS

2.1. Fikardou. An authentic, picturesque rural settlement

An example of State intervention is the case of Fikardou, one of the most picturesque rural settlements in the island [5], which over time has preserved its original architectural character (Fig.1). The village was built on a slope along a river. Most houses are built in a continuous building system and have

a second storey, with an inclined roof which covers part of the ground floor. Many houses have a small yard surrounded by a high wall with a door opening to the road (*xoportí*). Usually the upper floor hosted the main living rooms, while the ground floor served auxiliary uses (storerooms and stables). Vine growing and wine production traditionally constituted the basis of the village economy, along with cereals, olives and almonds [6]. In most homes, there is a small wine press facility on the ground floor. On the upper floor there is often a semi-open space called an *iliakos* in front of the rooms. The rest of the horizontal roof of the ground floor served domestic functions, like sun-drying of grapes and pulses. The houses are built with local irregular stones with a mudbrick superstructure. An interesting feature of the village is the presence of stone members bearing an engraved cross and the acronyms IC XC NI KA, laid above the entrance door of several houses.

The village remained unaffected by changes in lifestyle until the beginning of the 20th century but unfortunately, during the last decades, the population gradually decreased approaching complete abandonment due to urbanization and the decline of agriculture. According to statistics, Fikardou had 64 residents in 1881, increasing to 122 in 1931 and remained at about 120 until 1946. Then the population began to decline steadily. In 1982, the population did not exceed 13 residents, most of whom were elderly. More recently, the population was 2-3 people. Most houses were abandoned. In some cases only the walls remained intact after the collapse of the roof. Thus a question arises concerning the possibility of a total or partial reconstruction of all the village dwellings.

In the 1970's State intervention was considered essential. In order to protect both the character and the natural environment of this important settlement which faces the danger of total abandonment and destruction, the Department of Antiquities declared almost the entire village an ancient monument, and the surrounding land a controlled area in 1978. This legislative protection created the prerequisites for the implementation of practical measures towards the conservation of the village houses. According to article 8 of the Antiquities Law, an Ancient Monument cannot be demolished and no conservation works or interventions of any kind can be carried out without the permission of the Director of the Department of Antiquities. Conservation work must be supervised by this Department. A government contribution covering up to 50% of the total expenditure is granted. In 2008-2009 the Department of Antiquities collaborated with the Department of Town Planning and Housing in re-planning the surrounding zones for more efficient development of the region. The implementation of the new zones will restrain development in the surrounding area in order to protect the natural environment.

As a first step to the revitalization and preservation of Fikardou, some of the most important and representative buildings were expropriated and conserved by the State in the early 1980's (ancient monuments of schedule A). Then the Department of Antiquities began a comprehensive maintenance and rehabilitation of more than ten private houses of the settlement (ancient monuments of schedule B). The plans were prepared by the architects of the Department and the conservation works were carried out by its staff. Later on, the conservation work in private homes was carried out by the owners themselves but supervised by the Department. The basic principle for the conservation of the houses was initially to cope with the serious structural problems and at the same time to preserve the original typology, morphology, and construction, with some interior modifications which were considered necessary to provide modern facilities according to the needs of the owners.



Fig. 1-2 Fikardou. General view of the village before (1) and after conservation works (2)

Conservation work started by the end of the decade of 1970 and continues at an increasing pace in recent years due to the continuous growing interest of the owners for the rehabilitation of their homes.

Within this framework, several buildings have been preserved, such as the communal wine press and other houses. A house on a hill, to the south of the village, which in the past occasionally functioned as a coffee house, has been converted into a restaurant. Two of the most important dwellings in the village, the house of Katsinioros [7] and the house of Achilleas Dimitri which were acquired by the State were converted into local rural museums as living examples of a rural home of the previous centuries. Drawings and photographs as well as furniture, tools and fixtures related to rural life and occupations of the residents are on exhibition. The conservation of houses was not carried out with the intention of converting the entire village into a museum by preserving architectural forms and structures that belong to the past. The ultimate goal was to create the prerequisites for the enhancement and promotion of authentic specimens of vernacular architecture, leading to the revitalization of this important traditional settlement of the island.

This effort had excellent results from an architectural point of view since most of the vernacular buildings were restored (Fig.1-2). Two of the houses have been awarded a Europa Nostra Prize for their proper conservation. Some houses, although fully conserved, are rarely or not at all used by their owners, who live in the cities or abroad and come to Fikardou only on rare occasions. Here some questions arise concerning what policies should be followed to safeguard the social revival of the village as despite the efforts of the Department of Antiquities, the village was not socially regenerated. Nevertheless, the village is now one of the most attractive tourist destinations, mainly due to the fact that it has been the venue for on-location filming of a very popular TV series related to village life. This reminds us of the important role that advertisement can play for the promotion of a place. It also demonstrates how sometimes innovative measures can have better results than rehabilitation plans.

2.2. Parsata. A small seasonal settlement

The revival of Parsata, another ruined village situated on a small plateau in the semi-mountainous area of Larnaca district, is included in the immediate plans of the State. This settlement is completely abandoned. It used to be the seasonal habitation site of the neighbouring village of Ora and functioned as a place of residence for people when they were busy with certain agricultural activities in the region [1]. Parsata was built entirely of local materials, thus being integrated into the surrounding land. Its abandonment led to the preservation of its particular character without any architectural intervention or changes. It used to be a small, poor settlement, mentioned in Mediaeval sources from 1367 to 1565 with the name of Parsata [4]. By that period, the village of Ora appears in written sources. Could this mean that there was a movement of the inhabitants from Parsata who founded a new village, Ora? If this was the case, the people of Ora kept returning to the original village during harvest season, in order to attend to their various agricultural activities. The decline of agriculture and the new life style introduced in Cyprus with the socio-economic changes that occurred in the last decades brought about the abandonment of the settlement. The village is now in a terrible condition, with several dwellings in various degrees of dilapidation. Only one house is occupied. Several houses are used as sheepfolds. Parsata consists of about thirty dwellings. Its population was always very limited. In 1891, there were only two inhabitants. The number increased to twenty in 1901 and decreased to eight in 1911. In 1973, there were only two inhabitants, while in the census of 1976, the village appears abandoned. According to J.C. Goodwin [1978], in the past the settlement had a population of under fifty [8]. It is obvious that the population of the village varied over the years, according to the activities of the residents of the parent village of Ora.

All of the vernacular dwellings are single-storey, with flat roofs. It is not clear whether the buildings had private yards, as no surrounding walls have been observed (Fig.3). The layout of the settlement is random and is a result of successive development. Interesting architectural ensembles are the eight threshing areas (*alonia* – large open spaces laid with slabs) that are located within its boundaries, and which played a significant role in the agricultural production of the area in the past. Almost all of the rooms are of the wide-front type of *macrynari* (a long rectangular room) with an entrance on one of its long sides, which divided the functional space into two sections: one for the everyday activities and sleeping and the other for the storage of goods [9]. In most cases each *macrynari* constitutes an individual house. The roofs were usually constructed with the use of irregular roughly-worked tree trunks, smaller timber elements, dry plants and clay mud (Fig. 4).

The abandonment of the settlement was gradual and its life disappeared when the economic and social reasons for its necessity had ceased. The owners themselves have not shown any interest in its preservation and revival. This village, together with the neighbouring village of Drapia, constitute two unique examples of purely agricultural settlements. In this context, the Department of Antiquities has

implemented the expropriation of the settlement in its entirety. Thus, the whole village is about to be included in the list of ancient monuments of the First Schedule (State property, protected by the Antiquities Law). All expenditure regarding its conservation will be covered by the State.

Meanwhile, the Department has proceeded with the documentation of the existing situation. As a first step, detailed architectural drawings and an accurate topographical survey have been prepared. The next step will be research on the socio-economic history of the settlement and the preparation of the conservation project. The aim is to preserve the settlement in its original form without the usual interventions that are necessary in the case of privately owned residences. Not only will the authentic typology and morphology be maintained in the conservation works, but also the construction materials and traditional building techniques. Some questions arise about the conservation of the more ruinous dwellings and the way they are going to be preserved avoiding any modern intervention.



Fig. 3 Parsata. General view of the village



Fig. 4 Parsata. View of traditional houses

The State is investigating methods of exploitation of the settlement (open air agricultural museum, thematic park, tourist destination, etc.). The Department of Antiquities intends to preserve this village for reuse as a huge workshop for professionals in rehabilitation, a case study for research in traditional architecture and as a living rural museum for the younger generations. The dwellings, once they are fully conserved, will be used for presenting rural life and its various activities – such as harvesting, threshing, bread and cheese making. This museum approach, despite the fact that it will safeguard its preservation with a didactic character, will not serve towards the social regeneration of the settlement. The lack of permanent local inhabitants of the settlement justifies this proposal since it had always functioned as a seasonal place for the residences of the neighbouring village.

2.3. Pano Pyrgos. A picturesque isolated settlement

The traditional village of Pano Pyrgos of Tylliria is a small and isolated settlement in the Nicosia district. The reduction in the population of Pano Pyrgos coincides in time with a respective increase of the population of Kato Pyrgos, a neighbouring village, when at the beginning of the 20th century the residents of Pano Pyrgos moved to Kato Pyrgos due to economic, social, and geomorphological

reasons [10]. According to statistics, Pano Pyrgos had 300 residents in 1881, increasing to 432 in 1901. After 1931 the population began to decline steadily. In 1946 it had 376 and in 1956 only 174. In 1973, 126 residents remained and the population continued to decline. In 1982, the population did not exceed 72 residents, most of whom were elderly. More recently, the population has become less than 10 people. Most houses are now abandoned.

Pano Pyrgos presently constitutes a special and peculiar part of the wider region of Tylliria with a unique character. The location of Pano Pyrgos in a mountainous, rugged landscape, its isolation and social development all contributed towards the creation of a unique settlement with an introverted lifestyle regarding the outside world but openness towards itself (Fig. 5). The difficult access to Pano Pyrgos due to its location and geomorphology of the territory led to a free arrangement of the dwellings without distinct boundaries and special separation of the settlement from the surrounding area. This led to the creation of houses merging with nature and the landscape. Streets are narrow and zigzagging following the organization of streets in primitive traditional settlements. The shaping of public areas and the creation of communal buildings of architectural distinction with regard to the rest of the buildings is generally limited because of the uniform social organization of the settlement.



Fig. 5 Pano Pyrgos. General view of the site



Fig. 6 Pano Pyrgos. View of a traditional house

The primitive type of house with a flat-roofed, wide-fronted *makrynari* can be observed, constituting the principal cell of the settlement and the society (Fig. 6). The very few *double-space* rooms with their hand-carved decorations of wooden elements constitute the only distinction between dwellings. The dwellings are always organized with direct relation to the yard, since through this open space communication between the individual spaces is achieved. The yards are not defined by distinct boundaries and high walls. The construction of the walls (local rubble stones) is closely related to the local materials, leading to a full integration of the houses into the environment (Fig. 5). The almost

exclusive use of projecting wooden elements for the creation of large roof extensions gives the village of Pano Pyrgos a primitive character and enhances its harmonization with the surrounding environment.

The settlement is generally characterized by simple forms and shapes and the prevalence of the human scale. The traditional architecture of this settlement constitutes a cultural expression directly associated with the location and the society it serves. The spatial shape of the settlement seems to be directly related to its historic and social development since its architectural character (building boundaries) and planning organization (degree of isolation, density, ways of movement, etc.) were based on these parameters and elements. The position of the settlement in a mountainous area only few kilometers away from the seaside in combination with its excellent architectural character make this traditional site unique and a perfect place for vacations. In the island there are only a very few traditional settlements with such a location which helps towards its regeneration and revival for tourist purposes.

3. DISCUSSION

When dealing with an abandoned settlement the approach to be followed depends on the evaluation and hierarchy of the different values of the site and constitutes a multidisciplinary procedure. The social value and the need for the reuse of most of the vernacular settlements is usually considered of utmost importance compared to the other values (historical, aesthetical etc.). The consideration and investigation of the factors that led to the abandonment of a traditional settlement is also essential before the final decision for action is taken. The investigation of the three case studies revealed that one of the most common causes for the desertion of vernacular settlements is the cessation of agriculture activities and the socio-economic change of life (Parsada, Figardou). Additionally, the industrial revolution and the urbanization led the inhabitants of many rural houses of traditional settlements to move into cities or larger neighbouring villages (e.g. Pyrgos), abandoning their houses or selling their properties to developers. There are many different thoughts and approaches towards the revival and regeneration of abandoned settlements. Special consideration is often given towards the revival of the previous agricultural life as this helps towards the return of the former inhabitants or their descendants to their villages. Thus the previous continuity in use of vernacular buildings and settlements from one generation to the next (referred to in the Icomos Charter of Vernacular architecture) is regained.

Considering the three above-mentioned case studies as well as other abandoned and ruinous settlements of the island, the question arises: Is it better to restore all the buildings of a ruined village so as to make it functional again or is it preferable to preserve at least some of them in their existing condition? There is not a simple answer to this question since each individual case is different from the others. When only small parts of the buildings are left and there is no indication of their original form and at the same time there is no need for their rehabilitation and reuse by the owners, the decision for their preservation is directed towards conservation in a ruined condition, thus revealing their authentic and picturesque elements in order to promote them as symbols and as places for visitors. In these cases extensive reconstructions, which probably lead to the loss of the authenticity of the settlements, are avoided. This approach can be related to the theories of keeping the old structures "open" for interpretation [11, 12]. The critical question in every conservation work is whether a condition of wholeness is an absolute requirement [13]. Indeed, most of the restoration debates of the late nineteenth century in Europe revolved around the decisions to complete individual monuments, sites and settlements, thereby establishing their architectural and stylistic unity. If most of the dwellings are to be preserved in a ruinous condition then the settlement will not regain its previous social character and life but on the other hand if the best-preserved structures are completely restored and reused a balance between ruined and restored structures will be achieved.

When dealing with the future of an abandoned village there is often a dilemma: should most of the actions be oriented towards the "maintenance" or the "development" of the settlement. The division of whole settlements into "dead" and "living" is not considered appropriate anymore, because every site, in any condition, is a "living" example of civilization, capable of transmitting certain messages. "Museum" conservation and "passive" maintenance of a whole traditional settlement is considered as the best option only in extreme cases. Museum conservation can be followed only in some individual buildings (e.g. the two important historic houses in Figardou). It is preferable for the rest of the buildings to be rehabilitated following different approaches towards their functional reuse. According to

Francesca di Filippi, to preserve vernacular built heritage means to deal with “living” environments, not merely built-up sites. Sustainability of cultural heritage is about managing the balance between preservation and use [14]. This is also the case of the regeneration of historic villages in Portugal where only a couple of buildings were converted into museums while the rest of them incorporated agricultural and other uses. More specifically, the rehabilitation project of several degraded mountain villages in Algarve, the southern region of Portugal, showed a significant increase of utilization both by locals and visitors. In one of these villages, the village of Cachopo, an old farmer’s house and its surrounding area has been transformed into a museum for vernacular arts and traditional occupations. Another example is the transformation of the old primary school in Santa Rita (a village in the same area) into a local museum and investigation centre [15]. Similar projects for the revival of degraded mountain villages have been employed in France, Slovenia and Spain. Within this frame falls also the museum conservation suggested for Parsada. In this case there will be an effort made so that the settlement will become a living rural museum avoiding a passive maintenance.

The "dynamic maintenance" is rather more desirable, as it is based on the mobilization of people and the motivation of human resources. According to the internationally-accepted policy, the actions should aim at relating the settlements to new lifestyles, offering a new human environment. This can be achieved by the renovation of old buildings, the organization of social space and the dynamic integration of functions that enhance the revival of the settlements. The best solution is their preservation as a living heritage in the light of social and cultural content in the current economy. According to the Declaration of Amsterdam, the success of any integrated conservation depends on considering the social factors.

When dealing with abandoned settlements, tourist development is another important factor that is seriously considered. Agrotourist projects, where the inhabitants are staying permanently in their settlement dealing with their agricultural activities and at the same time offering the extra space in their houses or complexes to tourists, are now encouraged in many counties (Italy, Austria, China). Thus, the settlements do not act as seasonal hotels that are closed during winter and open again during summer. The interventions promote rural tourism in association with other activities such as agriculture, considering the villages as multifunctional spaces [15] and expanding both formal and informal activities [16].

Many local councils all over Europe are keen to see traditional settlements brought back to life with new investments. Albergo diffuso turns out to be a sustainable model for both development and preservation [17]. It is an innovative concept of hospitality, which was launched in Italy in the early 80s as a means of reviving small, historic Italian villages and town centres. It is a particular type of hotel conceived to provide to the guests a unique experience of living in a historical centre of a town or a village. It provides all the services of a traditional hotel (welcoming assistance, common spaces, meals) but the rooms are spread around the historical centre. In this model, visitors actually live among villagers, not like a traditional visitor but more like a short-time residents who are part of the community. They also have the chance to participate in various activities organized by the local authorities and other bodies and become familiar with the local culture, historical background, gastronomy and handicrafts. Albergo Diffuso has won the first prize within the first United Nations Development Program- European BICs Network contest which was held in Budapest in June 2008. Although, at present it is limited within the Italian boundaries (16 Italian regions), international interest has been expressed.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The involvement of local people in shaping and implementing new policies towards the revival of abandoned or almost abandoned settlements is essential. A continuous dialogue with the society that has created this invaluable wealth can lead to proper action for the benefit of the architectural heritage. The necessity of the support of public opinion and the participation of the population in every stage of the work (decision-making etc.) is underlined by the Declaration of Amsterdam. It is no exaggeration to mention that private initiative can overcome the often inadequate institutional support. The Charter of Icomos on the Built Vernacular Heritage declares that the appreciation and successful protection of the vernacular settlements depend on the involvement and support of the community’s continuous use and maintenance. Governments and responsible authorities begin to recognize the right of all communities to maintain their living traditions, to protect these through all available legislation, administrative and financial means and to hand them down to future generations.

According to the Kyoto Declaration on the protection of historic heritage (2005), when conserving abandoned vernacular settlements and generally cultural heritage at risk, a multidisciplinary approach to damages and assessments should be carried out, recognizing all the different values of built vernacular heritage, creating incentives for the conservation of vernacular housing, developing building codes compatible with traditional building practices, using authentic materials and skills for repairing, retrofitting heritage-rich buildings and ensuring community participation. Without the personal interest of the former inhabitants and the exact mechanisms of action, the derelict and abandoned settlements may not easily be integrated back into the social life of a place. To achieve this, the co-existence of development and conservation is essential, as well as the search for a sustainable balance and promotion of integrated programs enhancing the vernacular heritage and preserving its authenticity.

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