

Youth in Conservation of Cultural Heritage, YOCOCU 2012\*

A glimpse of YOCOCU future.  
Cultural Heritage in Azerbaijan via MIRAS Social Organization  
and Agsu Archaeological Expedition

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\* Event organized by Italian Association of Conservation Scientists (IA-CS) and University of Antwerp

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## Introduction

MIRAS Social Organization in Support of Studying of Cultural Heritage is based in Baku, Azerbaijan and engaged in propagation and development of cultural heritage. MIRAS Staff includes experts like historians, archaeologists, artists, sculptors, restorers, engineers and others. MIRAS Organization has also many members.

The Organization implements the following duties to gain its purposes:

- to assist to fulfilment of scientific-research work on study of cultural heritage;
- to assist the research and popularization of our national and moral values;
- to assist repair and restoration of historical monuments and other objects;
- to study our forgotten traditions and deliver to next generation.

In 2010-2011 Agsu Archaeological Expedition of NASA Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography carried out large-scale archaeological explorations in medieval Agsu town with initiative and support of MIRAS Social Organization. As a result of the excavations many construction remnants and rich artefacts belonged to 18th century were revealed. There are also numerous numismatics materials, unique art patterns, as well as other materials proving trade and cultural relations of Agsu town with a number of countries and cities of the world amongst the finds.

## Cultural Heritage Policy in Azerbaijan



Logo of Cultural Heritage Department  
of Ministry of Culture and Tourism of  
Azerbaijan Republic

The history of preservation of cultural heritage in Azerbaijan starts with the decision adopted by Azerbaijan Revolutionary Committee on restoration of Khan Palace in cities of Shusha and Shaki in 1921. National and cultural monuments of Azerbaijan are declared state treasure due to 4 March 1924 decision of People Commissioner Council and their registration and protection are provided. During the first 20-25 years of the Soviet power, there were humiliating attitudes towards religious and architectural monuments. A lot of mosques and mausoleums turned to store-houses, cellars and so on. Bibi Heybat Mosque (7-19th century), Muslim religious-memorial complex in Baku, well-known Alexander Nevski Church (19th century), Roman Catholic Church (1900) were exploded, destroyed and razed to the ground in the 30s. Restoration work was conducted by Azerbaijan Central Department of Monuments Protection, which has poor finance means and believed in staff enthusiasm in the first years of the Soviet time. Unique Soviet laws on protection of cultural heritage were valid in Azerbaijan. Local laws were made along with these laws. Azerbaijan USSR Council of Ministers adopted a law on “events on improvement of preservation of cultural monuments” on 14 October, 1948. Concrete events were fixed in this law on protection of historical and cultural monuments. A Special Science and Restoration Workshop was arranged in 1952 by the decision of Azerbaijan USSR Supreme Soviet Presidium and engaged in the restoration of the most important monuments since the first acting moments. The monuments restored in those years are world-importance monuments today for their unique character. The workshop staff was consisted of young architects and they had no practice on the restoration and therefore they were obliged to use construction technology and materials used in the work procedure at that time. “Restorer” office was created in early 80s, that aimed at research and restoration of Baku and architectural monuments surrounded Baku. The acting of this organization is characterized with high activeness in the restoration work of Icharishahar and Absheron monuments. Department of Monument Protection within Ministry of Culture had engaged in the protection of historical and cultural monuments till 1992. In 1992-2000 State Committee of Historical and Cultural Monuments’ Protection and Restoration was created within Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic. This Committee was commissioned with all duties on protection, restoration and usage of monuments located inside the republic. After the Committee was liquidated the Ministry of Culture was given back its functions. General department on preservation, restoration and usage of historical and cultural monuments was created there. Supervision over the state of the on-site monuments is implemented by culture department of executive powers of all cities and regions of the republic [1].



### MIRAS Social Organization

MIRAS Social Organization in Support of Studying of Cultural Heritage has been established on 6 June, 2010 in City of Baku by historians, archaeologists and engineers. The Organization increased its members and after a short while it has been registered by Justice Ministry of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 31 March, 2010. Different projects were followed by its members, creating conditions for the Organization’s acts for study, preservation and propagation of cultural heritage in Azerbaijan by the way of donations and grants. The greatest project of the

Social Organization is “Archaeological tourism complex project of medieval Aghsu town”. The members of MIRAS Board, believing in the reliance of archaeological tourism for propagation of wide spheres of cultural heritage, decided to submit the project “Development and propagation of archaeological tourism in Azerbaijan” to Council of State Support to NGOs under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2011. The project was supported by the Council and archaeological tourism could draw the attention of the community for a short while in Azerbaijan. The Organization, which elaborates large cultural heritage projects holds seminars, courses, conferences and exhibitions for enlarging cultural heritage knowledge and conducting enlightenment work of people. MIRAS Organization implemented a structured system for last two years. MIRAS has presently six departments: Cultural Heritage Research, Conservation and Restoration, Exhibition and Design, International Relations and Information, Children and Youth Department and Press and Design [2].

### Medieval Aghsu town

Aghsu town distinctive for the number of population and the capacity of area, amongst last medieval towns of Azerbaijan, was the main city of Shirvan in 1735-1806. The name of Aghsu is recalled in historical sources primarily as a trade and art point since 16th century [3].

In 1735 Nadirqulu khan (Nader shah after 1736) moved population of Shamakhi City, which damaged and became worthless because of earthquakes and wars, to Aghsu, rebuilt the city with new and strong design. Local authors lived in that time and afterwards - Hashimi Shirvani, Zulali Shirvani, Aga Masih Shirvani, Shakir Shirvani, Haji Zeynalabdin Shirvani, Abbasqulu aga Bakikhanov, Seyid Azim Shirvani and others called this city “Aghsu” as a rule in their work [4].



Last medieval age authors informing about houses’ constructing of low and clay in Aghsu city dealt with the city market where colourful silk clothes, various type goods trimmed with gold and silver are sold. European and Russian merchants come to Aghsu and engaged in in, copper and fur trade.

In early 19th century the population of Aghsu city is taken from 15510 manat taxes and a large part of that was related to paintry. That shows wide development of paintry in Aghsu.

Bieberstein who came to Shirvan in two years after attack of Aga Mohammad Shah Gajar wrote about Agsu: “The space of Agsu town is square, width and length are 800 inches. The town walls are covered in eastern style, with towers in a circular and square form. Fence around the city is not considered a strong defense barrier because it is built of adobe. In 1795 Aga Muhammad khan passed River Kur, went there and destroyed the city” [3].

There is information on Agsu town’s possession of 5-10 thousand population in different time. Vadim Leviatov comparing the number of population of last medieval towns fixes that Agsu town prevails the list with 10 thousand people. Placement of great majority of Shamakhi population in Agsu and destructive wars’ causing decrease of the city population displayed such a scene [3].

### Ruins of Agsu town

The ruins of Medieval Agsu Town recalled like “Agsu” or “Yeni Shamakhi” in written sources but known as “Agsu fortress” or ‘Xarabasheher’ by local population is situated in the area of present Agsu region, 4-5 kilometres south-east from Agsu Town and around Ulguj, Arabushagi, Agarkh and Jurugly villages. Agsu Town was repeatedly destroyed by internal and foreign enemies in connection with many military political factors, hence the status of being official capital of Shirvan passed to Shamakhi later to Fit Mountain.



The area of the town covers about 40 hectare field being in a right-angled form. Around part is fortified with a deep ditch and very magnificent fortress walls being in shaft form. Digging a ditch in south, south-west and south-east parts and construction of fortress walls are not completed. Upon elaborating specified topographic plan of the monument by the experts, it became known that the town area is of square form for its design. The length of its north walls is 637, 3 m.; western walls 629, 5; eastern walls-632, 6 and southern walls-630,7 meter.

A ditch of 3-5 depth and 17-meter width is dug along the fortress with the purpose to provide validity of defense walls of the town. A very magnificent shaft is erected by using ditch’s inner soil entirely in the bosom of the fortress walls. The signs of fortress wall and a ditch are not observed in south-west corner of the town. Probably construction of the fortress walls in the site and digging of a defense ditch remained incomplete. Two artificial hills with approximately nearly 10-meter height and 16-18 meter diameter exist inside 10-15 meter into the fortress walls in south-west and south-east corner of medieval Agsu town. At first glance, the hills seem as fortress tower that is in fact non-convincing, i.e. they have no relation with fortress walls. In this case they are thought to be an observation point [5].

There are four cemeteries around the monument. A part of the grave stones of the cemetery is fixed to belong to late 18th century. According to grandiosity of memorial walls and notes overhead, it is seen well-known people from kin of Shirvan rulers are buried mainly in the cemetery [5].

### Agsu archaeological expedition

Primary archaeological explorations in last medieval Agsu town (Kharaba sheher) were held by Agsu-Ismayilly expedition under guidance of archaeologist Fazil Osmanov in 1983. The following results obtained during the explorations:



1. Last medieval Agsu town is one-layer monument. The thickness of cultural layer is 1,4-1,6 meter. Artifacts including rich ceramic ware and coins obtained as a result of the excavation testify existence of intensive urban life in 18th century.

2. Colourful artifacts revealed during primary explorations differ from materials of other cities of Azerbaijan for many peculiarities, including graphic, graphical and technical, as well as technological features. Wide exploration of artifacts and of that monument from this standpoint entirely

assumes special topicality within the terms of deep and comprehensive research of last medieval urban civilisation in Azerbaijan.

3. Last medieval Agsu town is one of unique archaeological monuments of Azerbaijan that no construction, excavation and economy work was conducted in its area after the city's decline. It means the city edifices, manufacture hearthes, streets and squares remained better as compared with other monuments [6].

All of these assume extremely scientific importance from the viewpoint of study of internal design, architecture styles, renovation, sanitary and water supply, development level of urban craftsmanship, development and regress trends observed in separate art fields in Azerbaijan cities in the dealt period. In other words, monument Agsu (Kharaba sheher) is a kind of standard from the scope of study of last medieval urban problem not only in Azerbaijan, but also entirely Caucasus. Taking these into consideration, large-scale archaeological explorations launched by joint archaeological expedition of NASA Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography and National Museum of History of Azerbaijan in March 2010 in initiative and financial support of MIRAS Social Organization.

In 2010-2012 archaeological explorations are conducted in 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7th excavation sites, in general 15000 sq/ms site is explored. The most important finds revealed upon archaeological explorations are as the follows:

- 1 – A part of north fortress walls of city;
- 2 – Construction complex where military garrison watched in front of the fortress walls;
- 3 – 80 sq/ms bath complex;
- 4 – Remnants of building-rooms built in special architecture style. There revealed numerous wall ornaments-cornices in a destroyed and unstuck position inside one of them;
- 5 – One of main streets in east-west direction of city and some other streets and roads of quarter type;
- 6 – large and small water pools, inner part of which is accurately plastered;
- 7 - underground water-supply lines provided at least one or more quarters of the city with drinking water and around of which is built of stone;
- 8 – Water line of pottery tungs prepared specially in two sides;
- 9 – Sewerage network, the sides and surface of which are built of river stone;
- 10 – Two productive furnaces;
- 11 – Nearly 30 various tendirs, over 60 various-size and various-form hearthes;
- 12 – Rich and colourful artefacts, as well as:
  - a – Stone tools made skilfully of mine stone, home and economy items;
  - b - Metal casts and things;
  - c - Glassware brought from various countries and things of local production;



d - A lot of ceramicware. They consist of enamelled and unenamelled dishes used in home and economy, construction ceramics comprised of water tungs and plotted glazed tiles. A scene specified as an indicator of pompous life style of aristocrats using different dyes over one of the plotted tiles;

e - Numerous faience and porcelain wares made delicately. Chinese, Iranian and European samples prevail amidst the finds of this kind;

f - A plenty of copper and silver coins minted in Agsu and other cities of Azerbaijan and brought by trade way from Russia and Germany.

Only 5th excavation site is divided into 78 squares each being of 8x8 meter size. Thus, 4992 sq/ms site was explored. One of the city's largest mosques was revealed in squares 7a, 7b, 7c, 7d, 7e, 8a, 8b, 8c, 8d, 8e, 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d, 9e in 5th excavation site. The capacity of a large building which we call provisionally Juma Mosque is 36x16 meter and covers 576 sq/ms area. The foundation of the mosque walls is constructed of river stone and the walls-from adobe. The size of the adobe is 22x22x5 cm. Numerous wooden materials were used in the mosque's construction. During the excavation the rests of poles, door trivets, stools from amongst the wooden materials were unearthed. Wooden materials are fastened mainly through big iron nails. Column trivet of 56 limestones is displayed inside the mosque. Column trivets are situated in 2,5 meter distance. The column trivet consist of basic part, smooth part where the wooden material sits along the whole circle and the tiny groove which the projection sits. The mosque floor is well forged and plastered accurately. Windows and alter of the mosque are of arched form and built mainly by baked brick and alabaster. The surface of the mosque is covered with trough-like tile. We encountered with the remnants of tile covered house in the city area for the first time. The tiles are shattered around the house upon destruction of



the mosque. Along with many through tile remnants, hundreds of tile fragments were taken.

A broad yard of the mosque opened to north covers squares 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d, 9e, 9v, 10a, 10b, 10c, 10d, 10e, 10v, 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 11e, 11v, 12a, 12b, 12c, 12d, 12e, 12v. The opposite part of the mosque is planked with limestones in many sites. The mosque yard, its western wall is covered with a fence built of limewater and baked brick, while, eastern and northern walls with fence built of river stone. A well was displayed intended for ritual Namaz, ablution before divine service in the middle of the yard, in 10c square. A tombstone belonged to Haji Hussein Muhammed oghlu is revealed in 11c square. Child graves are encountered around that grave.

A huge water pool of two chambers built mainly of river stone and plastered accurately by alabaster is revealed in squares 12b, 12c, 13b, 13c in the site adjacent to the mosque yard. It is supposed that the surface of water pool is closed as arch. Length of the pool is 10,25 meter, width 5,26 meter, depth 2,80 meter in general. The size of the largest chamber of the pool is 5,85x5,26x2,80 meter and of small chamber is 3,70x5,26x2,80 meter. Total capacity of the pool is 140,65 cube meter. Thickness of the wall amongst the chambers is 0,70 meter. Supposedly, the displayed pool served drinking water supply of city population, particularly those visited the mosque and resided around the mosque. Near that pool, in square 13a another relatively small pool (size 2,90x2,10x1,20 meter) was unearthed. Capacity of the water pool is 7,31 cube meter.

Two stone-floor roads (streets) lying in east-west direction and situated parallel in 30-35 meter distance in mosque's south were revealed. The first street covers squares 2a, 2 b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2v, whereas the second street- 6a, 6b, 6c, 6d, 6e, 6v squares. The doors of settlements open into all streets. Handicraft shops are not encountered in this site. All buildings are fixed for dwelling. The foundation of houses is built of river stones and walls of

adobe. There revealed houses which have small yard opened to the quarter in front of theirs, tendirkhana (bread bake) and sometimes a well as a rule in the yard and inside niches and hearthes. It is possible to imagine more clearly quarters and streets of medieval Moslem city with these finds.

A broad water line revealed in 5th excavation site indicates usage of advanced technical devices in water supply of the city. Water of Agsu River entered from one part of the city poured into wells in the quarters through water line built with river stone and in a form of underground water-supply. Four sides of the wells are built of accurately hewed river stone. All of the revealed wells are in a best position. Water lines passed sometimes under the house floors and the walls. The large woods and plates were used then. The hole of the well water was incessantly filled.

A number of artifacts- iron and copper items, faience dishes of Chinese and European production, glassware produced in England, local faience and pottery ware, copper and silver coins were revealed during archaeological explorations. It is interesting that western wall of the mosque is washed in this part and fallen over the many dishes the surface of which clothes are laid. Consequently, these pottery, faience and glass ware remained safe.

Epigraph Habiba Aliyeva explored more than 200 grave stones in three cemeteries which are situated around medieval Agsu town. The book "Medieval Agsu town epigraphy" which covers the results of the research is prepared for publication.

### Gold treasure

Treasure of golden coins disseminated next to one another was uncovered upon excavations in the 7th excavation site, called provisionally at 08:30am on 22 June, 2012. The site being cleansed from the rabbleness accurately under the scientific staff's control and taken photos, the coins were drawn up a report on-site by the expedition board and taken. Total number of the coins is 37. One of them was minted in 1781, the other-1786, three coins- 1787, the other one 1796, the rest 31 units were minted in 1800. All displayed golden coins are almost in good condition.



The coins of this treasure are Holland trade gold ducat. Alloy of coins 986, diameter-21,8 mm, thickness-1,3 mm, weight legal 3,49 gms, shape-round, edge-milled and surface-minted.

There is within ornamental square tablet the Latin legend on obverse. MO:ORD PROVIN FOEDER BELG.AD LEG.IMP expands to MOneta ORDinum PROVINciarum FOEDERatorum BELGicarum AD LEGem IMPerii which translates as "Coin of government of the provincial

federation of Belgium Conforming with the law of the Imperial".

A knight facing right standing in armor with a sword in right hand and a bundle of arrows in the left divide the year of issue 17 52 on reverse. Along periphery the Latin legend CONCORDIA RES PAR CRES HOL expands to CONCORDIA RES PARvae CREScunt HOLLandiae which translates as "Through concord little things grow - Holland" (Union is strength).

Analogous coin paradigms spread widely in various world countries in 18th century. According to the experts, in that period Holland gold ducats were the same significance of US Dollars.

The expedition board completed preliminary urgent research work for two days, handed the treasure on 25 June, 2012 to National Museum of History of Azerbaijan by the recommendation of Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography. According to director of the Museum, Academician Naile Velikhanly, Agsu treasure is sensationed significant find for our history. Naturally, such kind of finds will create opportunities to study more comprehensively a lot of issues on Azerbaijan cities' role in Middle Ages in trade of Europe and world trade from scientific standpoint.



### Archaeological tourism

The concepts of tourism and vacation are often differentiated in modern world. Some people wish to go and rest at the noisy, dusty megacity and the beach after walking over hot asphalt or the forest during the vacation, whereas some prefer to look at the photos taken on the background of the architectural monuments after the vacation and remember the historical places visited.

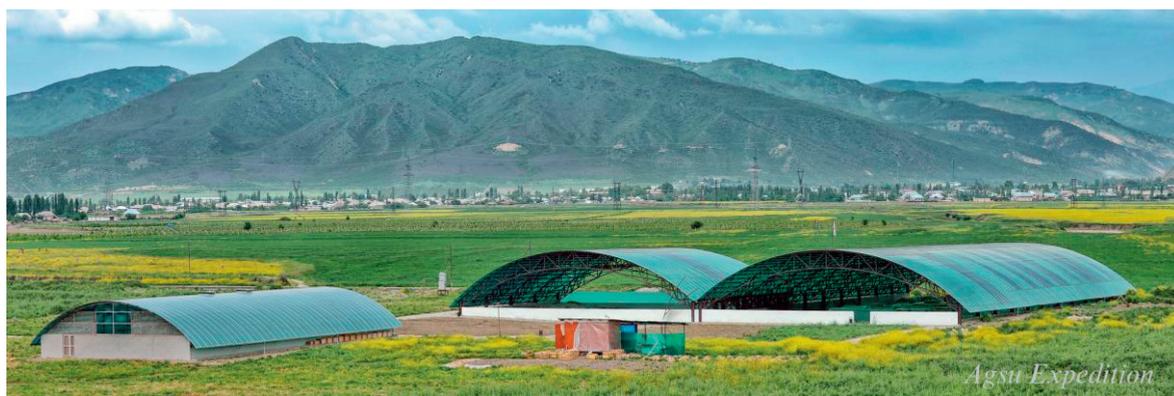
Archaeological tourism is currently one of new tourism fields in the world.

Archaeological tourism is understood as to participate at the archaeological expeditions and seeing archaeological monuments. These cultural and historical places, architectural monuments, museums are the form of the tourism directed to acquaintance with archaeological excavations and their preservation. Archaeological tourism exists for those wishing to partake at archaeological expeditions even if they are not historians and archaeologists; touch upon historical secrets; search ancient things and treasures.

This type of tourism does not work in Azerbaijan yet. We submitted the report covered antique period richnesses of Azerbaijan for participation at IV International Archaeological Tourism Conference held in Lima

City of Peru in 2008. Long distance of Peru and our inexperience in this domain prevented from our participation at this conference held every 4 years. However our initiatives in this field became gradually organized.

Our past forgotten under the ground for long years and history are condemned to sleep in the books and museums funds after the archaeological excavations. The excavated sites turn into the condition strange not only to a tourist but also archaeologists conducted the excavation after several years.



Our last purpose while elaborating the project of medieval Agsu archaeological tourism complex as MIRAS Social Organization was to implicate the attention of our country and world tourists to the region kept beyond the Azerbaijani tourism route. First of all the town left 200 years ago needed to be enlivened. Agsu Archaeological Expedition revealing fortress wall, Juma Mosque, bath-house, craftsmen shops, dwellings, water lines, sewerage and large streets in five excavation sites on 15000 sq/ms area for 3 years also found thousands of exhibits with no analogue in central museums. The second stage of the project needed to be shown at the exhibition for conservation of the revealed rests and tourists' short distance watch. The 3rd, 4th and 5th excavation sites were covered up; the surrounding flourished and the exhibition complex created in a short time. For tourists' comfortable reach an asphalt road was laid up from modern Agsu town up to medieval Agsu town. Parallel 3rd stage of the project covered propagational activity including publication of 3-volume "Medieval Agsu town" book-album in two languages; setting up Internet page "agsuexpedition.org"; electron passport of thousands of exhibits; "Agsu Wonder" exhibitions in region, capital and foreign countries; 3D views of 3rd and 4th excavation sites; producing TV documentaries shown in series programs on history on ITV and ATV Channels; arrangement of infotour of mass media representatives to the excavation site; holding introductory seminars to Baku universities, secondary schools, museums and libraries, etc. Our propagational actions in social network used widely by youth and members of intellectual community intensified the visit of tourist groups to the region without our initiative either.

Caucasus Expedition, taken place on 27 September-13 October, 2011 Caucasus Expedition is one of such initiatives. Caucasus Expedition of 32 visitors including European artisans, producers, photographers and writers travelled by bus over Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan- was the guest of MIRAS Social Organization, visited Silk Museum in Basgal and studio, stayed for the night in Greater Caucasus fresh air in Qaya Hotel arrived in Agsu on 9 October. After visiting Heroes Monument in Agsu, they went to Medieval Agsu Town. Along with the familiarization with the monument there they had a wonderful talk during tea-cloth in an open air with the workers and the expedition members. The interesting meeting continued around traditional table-cloth prepared by local settlers of Agsu from local cuisine in Chiyni Village. Such initiatives are bright example for transboundary collaboration in tourism.

MIRAS realized “Development and Propagation of Archaeological Tourism” project with financial support of Council of State Support to NGOs under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan within the scope of “Tourism Year” in 2011. “Azerbaijan Land of Monuments” documentary was shot within the project and deals with perspectives of 5 archaeological monuments (Goytepe, Qala, Qebele, Shamkir and Agsu) in the terms of archaeological tourism. “Azerbaijani Pearls” booklet covered those monuments was published and Internet page “archaeotourism.az” enrich with interesting information over archaeological tourism created. The held also seminars raised the youth’s interest in this domain. Our Organization was suggested holding joint seminars and reportages on archaeological tourism from countries like Turkey, Germany, Italy and Great Britain.

We presently offer two tour packages to local and foreign tourists: “Roads Lead to Shirvan Treasury” cultural heritage tours and Medieval Agsu Town” archaeological tours. Both tours are 7-day tours. Within these tours you can haunt and see cultural heritage monuments of historical Shirvanshahs-Lahij and Basgal settlements, Gulistan, Bugurt and Fit Fortress, Kelekhana, Diri-Baba and Yeddi Gunbez Tomb, Agsu, medieval towns of Shabran, Baku Fortresses, even Derbent. Tourist joining “Medieval Agsu Town” archaeo-tours may watch the archaeological excavation procedure under control of archaeologists in an open and fresh air; partake at the excavations; participate closely in cleanse and registration of finds. Foreign tourists joining the tour can stay in houses of local settlers; be in touch with them and walk around the surrounding monuments. Such tours are possible to be arranged on other monuments and also jointly with boundary states.

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