

Nikola Tasić

Bronze and Iron Age Sites in Srem and the Stratigraphy of Gomolava

Continuity of human occupation at Gomolava evidenced by a succession of superposed layers makes it possible to establish a reliable relative chronological framework for a large number of excavated sites in the area between the Sava and Danube rivers or more specifically in Srem. The region being investigated to an adequate degree, almost all Bronze and Early Iron Age sites may be quite reliably fitted into a system based on Gomolava's stratigraphic sequence. Minor lacunae revealed in the process result more from the synchronicity of different cultures or their variants in the Sava and Danube valleys than from interruptions to Gomolava's occupation. This is particularly characteristic of the Early Bronze Age II period, when Srem witnessed the intrusion and mixing of many cultures of different origin, above all the Vatin culture from the east and the early Encrusted Pottery culture from the Pannonian Plain. The occurrence of different styles in a closed context (pit or grave) at Gomolava or some other site in Srem confirms their contemporaneousness.¹

The accuracy of Gomolava's stratigraphy for the chronology of the Bronze and Iron Ages has been tested on some other sites in Srem or its immediate neighbourhood, most of all Gradina (meaning hillfort) on the Bosut river near Šid (Iron Age rather than Bronze), Šančine at Belegiš, and, most recently, at Petrovaradin Fortress, Feudvar near Mošorin (south Bačka), or Vučedol. This paper makes an attempt to fit their horizons into a slightly revised chronological scheme of Gomolava.² The corrections sug-

¹ N. Tasić, "Bronze- und ältere Eisenzeit auf Gomolava", in *Gomolava 1 (Chronologie und Stratigraphie der Vorgeschichtlichen und Antiken Kulturen der Donauniederung und Südosteuropas)*, Symposium, Ruma, 1986; Novi Sad, 1988), 49 ff; J. Petrović, "Grob ranog bronzanog doba sa Golokuta kod Vizića", *Rad vojvodjanskih muzeja* 26 (1980), 57 ff.

² N. Tasić, "Foreword", *ibid.*, 9-10.

gested here should make it possible to present the complete development of the Bronze and Iron Ages in this area.

A more comprehensive stratigraphy and periodization of cultural deposits at Gomolava was first proposed in the 1980s. As a result of twenty years of excavations, the cultural layer was graphically presented in the introductory text to *Gomolava 1* (1986/88). It was further developed in 1987.³ Today, almost 20 years later, it is possible to make further amendments and thus render the picture of the development of cultures in this part of Srem clearer and more complete. Some gaps in Gomolava's stratigraphy may possibly be filled with excavation data obtained from other sites, particularly as regards the phases that have yielded insufficient material for questions such as the relationship between the Vinkovci, Early Vatin and early Encrusted Pottery groups within the Early Bronze Age horizon, or the problem of too loose a periodization of the Early Iron Age as it is known from the stratigraphic sequence of Gradina on the Bosut or, finally, the problem of the end of the Early Iron Age, i.e. of the relationship between the so-called Srem group and the Celtic intrusion.⁴

Final Eneolithic – Early Bronze Age (Gomolava IIIc/IVa)

Although registered a long time ago, and dated to IIIc phase, the horizon with Vučedol pottery at Gomolava has only recently been given its first detailed study by J. Petrović and B. Jovanović.⁵ The study has called attention to the scantiness of dwelling structures, even more conspicuous as the culture is well-known for its developed architecture and fortified settlements (e.g. Šančine at Belegiš, Vučedol). In typological terms, two phases of this culture may be distinguished with much certainty: one that maintains the Kostolac tradition of pottery decoration and is close to the finds from Šančine at Belegiš, and the other that is characterized by a well-developed, often “roughly pitted”, deep-carved pottery, assigned by S. Dimitrijević to the very end of this culture, to its “Mitrovica phase”.⁶ The authors of the study have dated the Vučedol horizon at Gomolava to IIIc1 and IIIc2 phases. As for

³ N. Tasić, “Stratigrafski i relativnohronološki odnos Gomolave kod Hrtkovaca i Gradine na Bosutu”, *Rad vojvodjanskih muzeja* 30 (Novi Sad, 1987), 85-92.

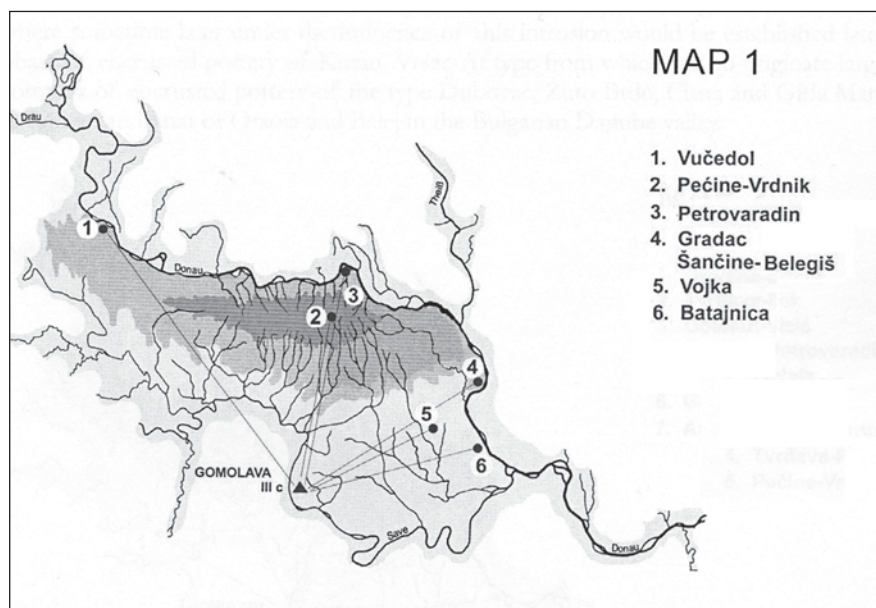
⁴ M. Garašanin, *Praistorija na tlu SR Srbije*, vol. II (Belgrade, 1973), 511-515; R. Vasić, “Sremska grupa zapadnobalkanskog kompleksa”, in *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja*, vol. V (Sarajevo, 1987), 555.

⁵ J. Petrović and B. Jovanović, *Gomolava 4. Settlements of the Late Eneolithic* (Novi Sad-Belgrade, 2002), 305 ff.

⁶ S. Dimitrijević, “Vučedolska kultura i vučedolski kulturni kompleks”, in *Praistorija jugoslavenskih zemalja*, vol. III (Sarajevo, 1979), 274-279.

other sites in Srem, subphase IIIc₁ would include Vučedol settlements or some of their horizons at Belegiš (Šančine), while Vrdnik, Golokut and the burials in tumuli near Batajnica and Vojka would fall within IIIc₂.⁷ Particularly characteristic are an urn and a large fragmented terrine decorated with deeply engraved concentric circles and red crusted paint from the tumulus known as Velika humka (Great Mound) at Batajnica. The final phase at Gomolava (IIIc₂) corresponds to a full-blown metallurgy phase of the Vučedol culture (metallurgical centres at Vinkovci-Tržnica, or the “foundry workers’ house” at Vučedol). This phase inaugurates the Early Bronze Age in the area between the Sava and Danube rivers.⁸

Many stratigraphic data from Srem show that the final Vučedol phase is overlaid by the earliest “truly” Early Bronze Age culture, known as Vinkovci or Vinkovci-Somogyvár. Notwithstanding considerable differences in style, it may be said that there is a chronological and even ethnic continuity between the two cultures. The greatest difference is the abrupt disappearance of deep-carving and other baroque techniques of pottery decoration typical of the terminal Vučedol culture. Some of the earlier shapes, however, were retained, given that the two cultures are directly superimposed on most Vučedol settlement sites in Srem (Petrovaradin Fortress, Belegiš-Gradac, Golokut near Vizić, Tvrđjava at Ilok, Tržnica at Vinkovci and other sites on the north and west slopes of Fruška Gora). In contrast



⁷ Petrović and Jovanović, *Gomolava*, 357.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 357. Petrović, “Grob ranog bronzanog doba”, 57 ff and Pl. I.

to Vučedol settlements, substantial structures are scarce on Vinkovci sites, where the houses are semi-pit dwellings with two connected rooms (Golokut, Petrovaradin Fortress, Zemun-Asfaltna baza etc.).⁹ The pit dwellings and pits as a rule abound in pottery finds, and often contain whole vessels of varied shapes, as evidenced by excavation at Gradina on the Bosut, Ilok, or in the periphery of Zemun (site of Asfaltna baza).

The presence of the Vinkovci culture at Gomolava amounts to a small number of potsherds. Considering that more than a half of the site has been eroded by the Sava river, it is not unlikely that some section of this sizeable plateau contained a smaller Vinkovci settlement. Be that as it may, the culture's place in the stratigraphy of Gomolava has been reliably established: between horizons IIIc₂ and IVa₁ which mark the beginning of the Early Bronze Age at this site.

Early Bronze Age (Gomolava IVa₁, IVa₂-b₁)

In the formative period of the Vinkovci culture derived from the final Vučedol, the Srem area witnessed the intrusion of both the early Vatin and the Encrusted Pottery culture, the latter being at first of Transdanubian and later of Szeremle type, as labelled by T. Kovacs.¹⁰ At Gomolava, this "jumble" of cultures is observable in horizons IVa₁ and IVa₂, and it was brought to an end by the intrusion of the Encrusted Pottery at the end of the Early Bronze Age (Gomolava IVb₁). Other sites in Srem show a similar picture. At Gradina on the Bosut there is within horizon III a rather powerful layer with pit dwellings and pits where late Vinkovci, Vatin and Transdanubian Encrusted Pottery wares occur in association. The same layer has also yielded a hoard of gold artefacts.¹¹ The material of the three cultures of different origins and styles has also been found in association in an inhumation burial and in the occupation horizon at Golokut. Beyond Srem, contacts between the Vatin and Encrusted Pottery cultures have been registered in the Early Bronze Age layer at Popov Salaš near Kač (the Novi Sad area),¹² where the

⁹ Petrović, "Grob ranog bronzanog doba", 57 ff and T. I.

¹⁰ T. Kovacs, "Die topographische und chronologische Stelle der Szeremle-Kultur in der Bronzezeit des südlichen Karpatenbeckens", in *Gomolava 1 (Chronologie und Stratiographie der Vorgeschichtlichen und Antiken Kulturen der Donauniederung und Südosteuropas, Symposium, Ruma, 1986 (Novi Sad, 1988), 155-167.*

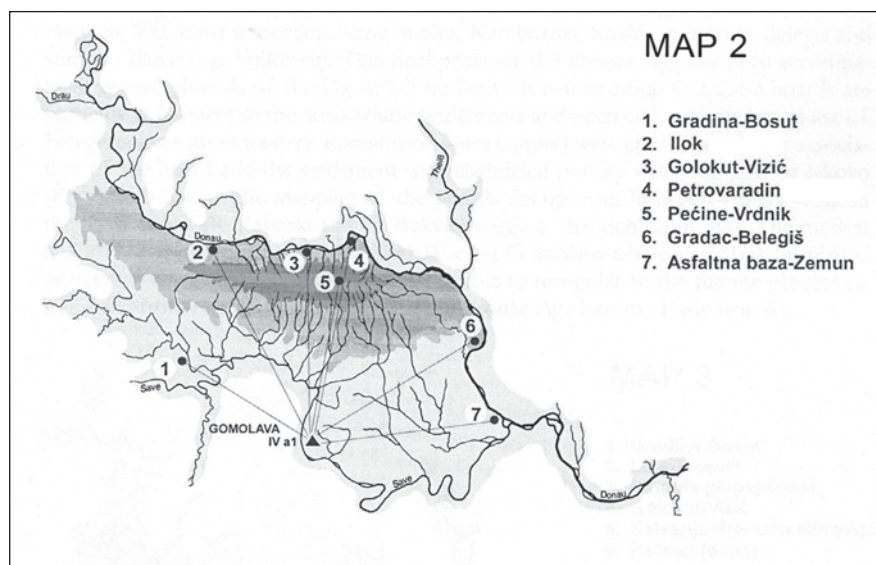
¹¹ N. Tasić, "Die Vinkovci Kultur", in *Kulturen der Frühbronzezeit des Karpatenbeckens und Nordbalkans* (Belgrade, 1984), 22.

¹² P. Medović, "Die inkrustierte Keramik der Mittelbronzezeit in der Vojvodina", in *The Yugoslav Danube Basin and the Neighbouring Regions in the 2nd Millennium BC, Symposium, Vršac 1995 (Belgrade-Vršac, 1996), 163-183.*

early Vatin layer with houses and pits has yielded pottery fragments decorated in the early style of Pannonian Encrusted Pottery. Most finds date from a time immediately preceding the penetration of the Szeremle culture towards Danubian Serbia, including the south Banat, where this intrusion somewhat later gave rise to a later Encrusted Pottery phase of Kovin, Vršac-At type. From the latter originated in turn the extensive Encrusted Pottery complex of the types Dubovac, Žuto Brdo in Serbia, Cîrna and Gîrla Mare in the Romanian Banat, or Orsoja and Balej in Danubian Bulgaria.¹³

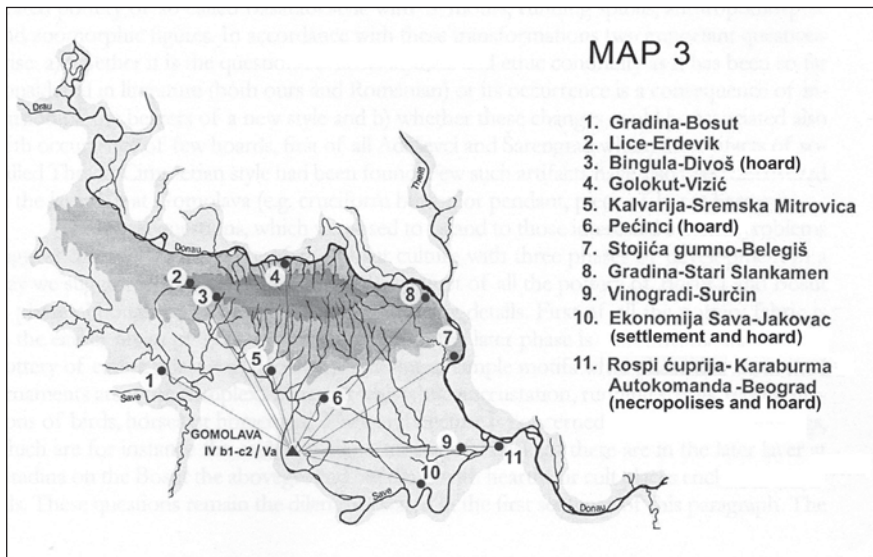
Middle and Late Bronze Age (Gomolava IVb-IVc2)

A stabilization in Srem and Danubian Serbia at large is marked by the Belegiš (Belegiš I–Cruceni and Belegiš II–Bobda) culture. At Gomolava, it belongs to the latter half of the Bronze Age and, according to some, continues into a new epoch, Early Iron Age. Horizon I is characterized by corded wares and in horizon II channelled pottery appears. Assuming that Srem was its core area, the culture spread rapidly and covered entire Srem, the central and south Banat and, finally, parts of western Romania. In Gomolava's



¹³ S. Morintz, *Contributii archeologice la istoria Tracilor*, vol. I (Bucarest, 1978), 28-40; M. Guma, *The Bronze Age in Banat* (Timisoara, 1997), 126-128; J. Uzelac, "Bronze Age of the South Yugoslavian Banat", in *The Yugoslav Danube Basin and the Neighbouring Regions in the 2nd Millennium BC*, Symposium, Vršac, 1995 (Belgrade-Vršac, 1996), 29-32, and Map 3; N. Tasić, "Das Problem der Funde von Szeremle im Banat und ihre Chronologie", in *The Yugoslav Danube Basin and the Neighbouring Regions in the 2nd Millennium BC*, Symposium, Vršac, 1995 (Belgrade-Vršac, 1996), 147-162.

stratigraphic sequence these are: horizon IVb (Belegiš I) with corded ware; IVc1, marked by the emergence of pottery (urns in necropolises) decorated with simple channels; and finally IVc2, where pottery becomes channelled in a “baroque” manner (horizontal and vertical garlands, faceting and the like). This final phase is assigned to the so-called Gava horizon. Such periodization has found direct or indirect confirmation at many other sites in Srem, in the environs of Belgrade and in the south Banat. Necropolises of this culture such as Belegiš, Karaburma, Rospi Ćuprija, Vinogradi-Surčin, or its settlements such as Ekonomija Sava (near Jakovo) confirm with much certainty the periodization based on the excavation of Gomolava.¹⁴ Dozens of excavated sites from this period show that settlements generally are smaller and single-layered, which precludes internal periodization; by contrast, necropolises contain several hundreds of burials, according to some estimates as many as 600, most important being Surčin, Karaburma, Stojića Gumno at Belegiš, and some in the Banat (e.g. Vojlovica). This final phase of the Bronze Age is characterized by many hoards of an Ha A1-A2 date. It is interesting that they are particularly frequent in the areas where late Belegiš (or Gava in western Romania) settlements and necropolises are found.¹⁵ A connection between a hoard and the settlement with channelled pottery has been ascertained at Jakovo (Ekonomija Sava). The mapping of Ha A1-A2 hoards in the south Banat (R. Rašajski and Lj. Bukvić) suggests identical



¹⁴ Tasić, “Eisenzeit auf Gomolava”, 48-51.

¹⁵ M. Guma, *Civilizatia primei epoci a fierului in Sud-Vestul Romaniei* (Bucharest, 1993), 181-194.

results. At Gomolava, the modest quantity of bronze artefacts in layer IVc2, which also contained black burnished pottery of Gava type, makes it possible to fully trace the process of Bronze to Iron Age transition.¹⁶

Early Iron Age (Gomolava Va-c)

Due to the absence of structural remains, notably houses, which would be a clear indicator of different phases of the site's occupation, the cultural layer at Gomolava may be more clearly understood through data from other sites. Some information is obtained from smaller pits filled with pottery material or from two collective tombs discovered in 1954 and 1971 respectively.¹⁷ The abovementioned problem of transition from one period to another may be solved only through comparative studies of the excavated material from other sites in Srem, notably Gradina on the Bosut which illustrates the complete and uninterrupted evolution of the Early Iron Age in this area. Additional data for the earliest Iron Age phase at Gomolava, designated Va, are provided by excavation at Kalakača and, to a lesser extent, Šljunkara near Zemun.¹⁸ A report of the latest systematic excavation at Petrovaradin Fortress has not been published yet but the finds will certainly be very helpful. At Kalakača, to the earliest Bosut horizon date the pits where the pottery typical of this culture (collective Tomb 1 at Gomolava) has been found in association with black burnished ware with garlanded or faceted decoration. This pottery, along with few related fragments from Gomolava IVc2, constitutes a link between the final Bronze Age and the beginning of the Early Iron Age. Similar conclusions may also be drawn for the pottery material discovered at Gradina on the Bosut, where the lowest Bosut horizons have yielded pieces, though only sporadic, whose technology of manufacture and method of decoration draw their origin from the terminal phases of the Bronze Age. Gomolava's Horizon Va containing this pottery, analogously to some assemblages (pits) at Kalakača, precedes the emergence of lavishly decorated pottery in the so-called Basarabi style (S-motifs, running spirals, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures). These changes raise two important questions:

a) whether there was an uninterrupted stylistic and ethnic evolution, as commonly suggested by archaeologists (both domestic and Romanian),

¹⁶ Uzelac, "Bronze Age", 35 ff and Map 8.

¹⁷ N. Tasić, "An Early Iron Age Collective Tomb at Gomolava", *Archaeologia Iugoslavica* XIII (Belgrade, 1972), 27-37.

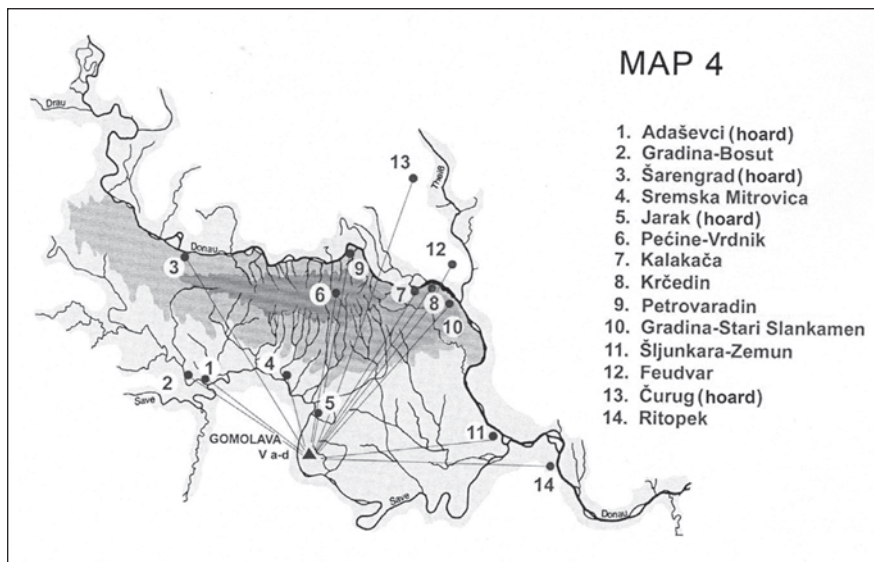
¹⁸ B. Petrović, "Skeletni grob starijeg gvozdenog doba sa lokaliteta Asfaltna baza u Zemunu", *Godišnjak grada Beograda* 38 (1992), 5-12; P. Medović, *Kalakača, naselje ranog gvozdenog doba* (Novi Sad, 1988).

or the changes resulted from the intrusion of the protagonists of a new style;

b) whether there was a connection between the changes and a few hoards (most of all Adaševci and Šarengrad) containing artefacts in the so-called Thraco-Cimmerian style. A few artefacts of the kind have also been discovered in level Vb at Gomolava (e.g. a cruciform button or pendant, a piece of horse tack).

These two questions lead us to give careful consideration to the issue of the continuous, three-phase evolution of the Bosut culture as it was proposed more than thirty years ago.¹⁹ First of all, Bosut I and II wares differ in many details. The earlier pottery is grey-brown, the later is black and burnished; the earlier bears simple linear decoration, the later shows more elaborate ornaments such as S-motifs encrusted in white, running spirals, depictions of birds, horses or horsemen. As for architecture, instead of pit dwellings as the sole type of houses at Kalakača, the later layer at Gradina on the Bosut shows aboveground structures with hearths or cult places adorned with spirals.

The question of continuity may also be posed as regards direct cultural and stylistic connection between two Bosut phases at Gradina, the second or Bosut-Basarabi II and the youngest, identified as the third and final stage of the presumably “unified Bosut culture” and represented by black pattern-burnished pottery decorated with sharp-edged channels. It has been labelled Bosut III, but there is not much evidence to corroborate the label.



¹⁹ N. Tasić, “Bronzano doba”, in *Praistorija Vojvodine* (Novi Sad, 1974), 258 ff.

At Gomolava it is represented by a rather small number of finds, mostly channelled cups, and labelled Gomolava Vc. The next phase – VI – belongs to a La Tène settlement represented by abundant pottery finds, kilns, many pits and hearths, and fortifications. B. Jovanović and M. Jovanović (1988), who studied the Late Iron Age levels at Gomolava in detail, dated them to the second and first centuries BC. It may be inferred therefore that there is a gap of several centuries between the last Early Iron Age phase and the earliest Celtic settlement (Scordisci). What was happening during that time, of which no trace has been registered in the stratification of Gomolava, or at Gradina on the Bosut, Petrovaradinska Fortress and other sites, is difficult to say with certainty. It is highly likely that the end of the Bosut culture (Bosut-Basarabi III) meant the end of occupation at Gomolava. This chronological vacuum may be filled with the so-called Srem group which is known from many sites (Sremska Mitrovica, Kuzmin, Salaš Noćajski), and especially from a hoard found at Čurug in the southeast of Bačka. M. Garašanin, R. Vasić and the author of this text date these presently only sporadic finds to a period between the end of the Bosut culture (Bosut III) and the earliest occurrence of Celtic finds in Slavonia and Srem.²⁰ In absolute dates that is a period between the fourth and second centuries BC, a pre-La Tène horizon of which no trace has been recorded at Gomolava.

*Serbian Academy
of Sciences and Arts*

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²⁰ Vasić, "Sremska grupa", 555 ff; N. Tasić, "The Pre-Celtic Population of the Serbian Danube Valley", in *Scordisci and the Native Population in the Middle Danube Region* (Belgrade, 1992), 75-82; P. Milošević, *Arheologija i istorija Sirmijuma* (Novi Sad, 2001), 13-20.

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