

The Rock Antiquity of Eleusis

Valeria FOL

Eleusis is a topos of faith, which dates millennia back. The hereditary layering of sacred buildings continued also with the change of religion; during the 5th century over the Telesterion a church was built, and over the cave called Plutonium the Temple of St. Panagia stands until the present day (Travlos 1988, 98 with references).

The clarification of the earliest period of the sanctuary and of the faith-ritualism professed there is difficult not only because of the lack of written sources for this period and the destruction of the earlier layers by numerous constructions and reconstructions in the sanctuary, but also because of the distractions due to the early archaeological missions, the incomplete publications and, not infrequently, due to the prejudiced interpretations of the source data. N. A. Silberman (1998) used the phrase *modern social ideology* in the changes of interpretation of the archaeological data for the collapse of the Late Bronze Age societies in the Mediterranean which were traced by him, and also for the role of the "sea people", from the viewpoint of the Europocentrism of the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century and of the social disintegration resulting from the industrialization which followed it, the international competition and the origination of powerful economic centers outside Europe. During the last ten or fifteen years of the twentieth century, the new "social ideologies" and "political waves", as well as the quick sociological-states' changes cause their influence even over the research on the Homeric epics (Silberman 1998, 272, for interpretation of the transformations in the oral epic tradition).

The successful attempt for surmounting the obscurities surrounding the architecture and stratigraphy of the so-called megaron B¹ and the rooms B1, B2, B3 connected with it at Eleusis belongs to M. L. Cosmopoulos, who re-examined the archaeological documentation: diaries, drawings, sketches, plans, photos, field specimen catalogues and finds, including the unpublished material (Cosmopoulos 2003)². He reached the conclusion that megaron B had served at the same time as a family house and temple, and was surrounded by a wall. The platform erected across hadn't got a constructional role; it was an altar for fire ritualism (pyre), whose parallel for the Mycenaean period is found

¹ For the use of the term *megaron* in Eleusis see Cosmopoulos 2003, No. 4; for the arbitrary use of the term for the Bronze Age see Werner 1993.

² Cosmopoulos used also the unpublished plan of Pisistratus's Telesterion made by J. Travlos with the Mycenaean walls (Fig. 1 1) marked in.

in the early Mycenaean temple in Epidaurus. The big number of statuettes found in the periphery of megaron B is a sign of ritual activity. According to M. L. Cosmopoulos, the analysis of the archaeological data shows that the ritual practices during that period included libations, animal sacrifices and votive offerings (figurines). The rituals were practiced in the yard and behind the walls, and the peribolos provided their secretness. This ritualism, according to the pottery, most probably began in LH IIB and perhaps continued also through LH IIIB, when the expansions of B1, B2 and B3 are dated¹.

G. Mylonas assumed that the building with three rooms had been connected to the Mycenaean megaron and had been an annex to it. The chambers most probably functioned also during the geometric period, to which belong two vessel handles (7th cent. BC), found over the oldest Mycenaean layer. The two handles are in the form of a griffin and of a pigeon (Mylonas 1961, 3, 7, 33-51). P. Darque resourcefully opposed Mylonas with the assumption that maybe the floor had been contemporaneous with the handles (1981, 599)².

M. L. Cosmopoulos reconstructed the architectural development of megaron B according to the following principles³: first, during MH and early LH period, a small rectangular building existed; megaron B, the platform and the peribolos were built in LH II/III A1, while rooms B1, B2 and B3 date back to the LH IIIB1 period. The enlargements and constructive changes, as M. L. Cosmopoulos notes, show a progressive development and “may suggest an initially unstructured and informal cult, which with the passage of time became more formalized” (Cosmopoulos 2003, 19)⁴. In his research on the “official” and “popular cults”, R. Hägg (1981) supposed that with the building of the peribolos at Eleusis, the profession of an “official cult” had been formed. The next stage in the development of the sanctuary, however, remains questionable also in M. L. Cosmopoulos’ studies.

G. E. Mylonas (1961, 3, 7, 33-51) and J. Travlos (1988, 91-102, Figs. 108-124) accept that the cult to Demeter and Kore was established around the middle of the 2nd mil. BC in the Telesterion⁵ and continued uninterruptedly until the 5th cent. According to Travlos, the Mycenaean megaron was a house of the Eumolpidae where they professed also a family cult to Demeter. Later, when the importance of the cult increased, the three-chambered annex designed for Eumolpidae’s house has been built, while the

¹ For the 1995 discovery of stacked potsherds from the EH II period in the area of the sanctuary see Cosmopoulos 2003, 2, 3 and No. 5.

² According to Darque megaron B is nothing more than Mycenaean ruins. Other authors also doubted that megaron B had been used for religious purposes during the earliest period. See Dietrich 1974, 224f.; Rutkowski 1986, 189-193, and especially 192f. for the LH II period; see also references in Cosmopoulos 2003, 20, Nos. 2-3.

³ See the last considerations of the archaeological material in Cosmopoulos 2003, 2-18.

⁴ For the formalization of the Mycenaean religiousness and for the architectural decisions to which these processes lead to, see Wright 1994.

⁵ See Clinton 1992, 126-132 for the rare usage of the word – seven times in the Greek literature tradition. Out of those seven times, five meant “an initiation hall”. For the edifice in the Eleusis sanctuary it was used very late, by Plutarch in *Pericles* 15: 7, as the author mentions. K. Clinton considers the terms in great detail and notes that *anaktoron* as well as *megaron* are the ones used most frequently, including in epigraphic monuments, for marking a place for sacred actions. See the summary regarding the terms used for Eleusis with the parallel ones for Samothrace in Clinton 2003.

megaron was used for temple needs only (Travlos 1988, 92). After M. L. Cosmopoulos' studies, J. Travlos' hypothesis regained its actuality but we have to remind that it belongs to M. P. Nilsson (1950, 468ff.). Taking the results of the nineteenth century studies on the pre-Greek (pelasgean) character of the cult to Demeter in the sanctuary, which were drawn from the written sources also into consideration, M. P. Nilsson formulated his conclusions. According to him, an agrarian cult was practiced at Eleusis during the Mycenaean period. It was a family cult, professed by the people living in megaron B, and became a universal cult in a later period.

According to the two conceptions for the development of religiousness from the Mycenaean period to the "Dark Ages" and later on, two theories for the changes in the cults to Demeter were formulated. According to one of them, the buildings where the cult had been professed during the pre-Greek period retained, of course, their functions after it as well. According to the other theory, the homes and castles of the rulers-priests from the Mycenaean period were transformed into temples during the following period. Even during his early research of the development and origin of the temples from the homes of local leaders/basileis, A. J. Mazarakis-Ainian supported Travlos' hypothesis for megaron B at Eleusis and did not abandon it even in his monograph (1988, 115f.; 1997, 347f.; for the doubts regarding the early use of the megaron for religious purposes see p. 149).

F. Noack (1927, 12-14)¹, V. R. D'A. Desborough (1964, 114f.), and W. Burkert (1985, 49 and No. 26) accept that the cult to Demeter at Eleusis was established around 700 BC. Later authors specify that the 8th cent. BC is the most probable time when the mysteries were instituted, and that feasting in the dark began in the second half of the 7th cent. BC. This is obvious from the finds in the pyre of the votive bearers, described and called "Alfa". It is a structure, which is located inside, next to the foundation of the angled wall, which surrounds the terrace from the geometric period². In this pyre the earliest materials from the geometric period of the Telesterion are to be found. G. Mylonas' (1961, 57) and J. Travlos' (1988, 92) opinion is, that this structure belongs to the Mycenaean megaron which was located on this terrace, and that the materials found there were put *in situ* next to the wall. J. Binder (1998, 134) accepts that the pyre of the bearer and the angled surrounding wall belong to one and the same site³.

The votive offerings found in the pyre date between the end of the 8th and the first

¹ Noack considers the offerings from the early archaic period and concludes that there are no traces proving cult related activity between LH IIIB and 700 BC. in the Telesterion. This thesis is accepted also by V. R. d'A. Desborough, W. Burkert and others. Noack supposes that Demeter's temple and the Telesterion are two separate edifices and that probably temple F, dated by him to the archaic period, played the role of a Telesterion until the new temple was built. He formulated his views before the excavations in the third decade of the twentieth century, which had proved that Demeter's temple and the Telesterion are one and the same edifice, and temple F is from the Roman era.

² This wall is preserved in the Telesterion. In the walls' south part, several stairs are still standing, which lead to the terrace at a 90 degree angle. F. Noack (1927, 11) defined this terrace as Demeter's first cult location, meant for sacred actions in open air. Based on the materials, he dated the wall between the late geometric and the early archaic period. W. Burkert (1985, 288) adopted Noack's thesis and added the possibility that the ritualism might occur around a fire. According to J. Travlos (1988, 92) this wall was built in 8th cent. BC under the Delphi's oracle immediate influence from 760 BC. The Delphi's oracle recommended an enlargement of the sanctuary (the megaron).

³ Generally for sacrifices at Eleusis see Clinton 1988.

decade of the 7th c. BC (Noack 1927, Figs. 4, 5; Binder 1998, 134, with references and detailed list in Nos. 20-23). Among the donations hand-made oinochoai, monochromic Argive vases, early spherical proto-Corinthian aryballos and a lot of rectangular clay tablets with tripods and big birds (hens?) painted on them, are to be found. In the pyre, 107 terra cotta figurines were found, two of which date back to the end of the 8th cent. BC. One of them maybe represents a cart-driver the parallels of which are from the sanctuaries in Olympia and Samos. The second figurine belongs to a goddess seated on a throne, which is composed of the front sides of horses. Doubtlessly, the lamps are most interesting. They date back to the second half of the 7th cent. BC. J. Binder (1998, 134 and No. 23) thinks that they possibly show the time when the night ceremonies were introduced. I would propose a specification of her opinion, namely, that the lamps show the time when the rituals were transferred inside. This would better correspond to the proven ritual constructions from the geometric period. According to J. Travlos (1988, 92, Fig. 115) five archaeological structures in the Eleusis sanctuary date back to the same period.

The so-called sacred home, which belongs to the early period, is situated outside the defense walls (4th c. BC). The building was dated by G. Mylonas (1961, 59-62), according to the earliest sherds found in the ashes, which belong to the beginning of the 7th cent. BC. J. Travlos dated the construction itself to the 8th cent. BC, following his theory for the upsurge of the sanctuary after 760 BC by recommendation of Delphi¹. According to J. Travlos, the Eumolpidae moved into this home after they had left the annex of the Mycenaean megaron when the sanctuary had been enlarged. J. Travlos dated the pottery found with the ashes, back to the end of the 8th cent. BC and explained it with cultural activity of earlier inhabitants. He described the grave found east of the building, as doubtless burial of a member of the Eumolpidae family who lived in this home (Travlos 1988, 92, Fig. 115). I consider as unjustified the theory that this building belonged to an "industrial district"² and was a place for ceramic production, including production of votive ceramics. No remains of a kiln or other artifacts expected from a potter's workshop had been found in the building.

Actually, all researchers see the building only as a place designed for rituals. As I said, W. Burkert accepted the possibility of open-air ritualism before Solon's time but he did not develop his guess because he was not acquainted with the preserved rock-cut monuments for ritualism in southeast Europe and did not recognize them at Eleusis³.

The initial rock character of the Eleusis sanctuary was preserved until the end of the

¹ Athens' establishment of the pan-Hellenic Προνουσία (a celebration of the expected ploughing with sacrifice) in the Eleusis' sanctuary is related to the Delphic oracle. It is disputable when exactly this occurred because the readings of Suda's lexicon are different. Harpocration s.v. Ἐλευσίς cites three different datings – the Third Olympiad (according to Harpocration), during Croesus' time (according to Pindar) and the 21st Olympiad (according to others). H. W. Parke concluded that this had happened during famine and dated the Delphic recommendation back to the early 6th cent. BC; see Binder 1998, 136 with sources and literature in Nos. 32-34. J. Binder thinks that G. Mylonas' and J. Travlos' opinions are not confirmed, and that there is no archaeological data for Προνουσία during the 8th cent. BC.

² For this supposition, retained without commentary, see Binder 1998, 135.

³ Burkert 1985, 288: "celebration in the open air around a fire before the building activities of the Solonian epoch". The supposition for ritualism on the open terrace around an altar was made even by F. Noack.

sanctuary's existence (Noack 1927, 168; Travlos 1988, 92). This was noted from the beginning of the research. Even Ictinus, one of the builders of the Parthenon, and architect of the new Telesterion from the 5th cent. BC, established the stone idea (Noack 1927, 167-175), and the Mycenaean tradition of formatting the sacred space accessible to a few. The walls, which surround the building, retain the peribolos and the temple only for the eyesight of the mystes. According to F. Noack, the middle part of the yard was covered. The understanding for a sanctuary originates inside the architecturally tamed space and not outside it.

Even though the idea of initiation in a confined space (identical to a rock womb) is clearly expressed in the Telesterion, no connection to the rock past of the sanctuary had ever been sought. According to F. Noack (1927, 21), the first hall of the Telesterion was the conceptual Hades entrance, but this cannot be proved by excavations. Same author thinks (1927, 242) that Kore's abduction was enacted in the Telesterion, and for this reason he disagrees with the stated opinion that there had been a basement under the Telesterion¹. This opinion was proved by later excavations. The cave as an entrance and exit to/from the Beyond and the rock throne where Demeter was seating are among the most important markers of the Eleusis' mysterial ritualism, and are proven by K. Clinton. I would add that the throne also belongs to the pre-Classical (called "pre-Greek" in literature) Great Mother Goddess. Clinton's analysis (1992) is based on the entire source material for the Eleusis sanctuary and the mysteries; written, epigraphic archaeological and visual data. Despite all this, he and the authors before him, did not pay attention to the rock sanctuaries in southeast Europe, Anatolia and mainly Phrygia, where they are documented best (Haspels 1971; Φολ 2000; Vassileva 2001; Roller 2002 and 2003). The lack of eventual comparison with these groups of monuments limits the opportunity for interpretation of the rock Antiquity of the Eleusis sanctuary. For this reason, the living rock with a beehive shape² located in the southwest end of the Telesterion and untouched by all reconstructions (Noack 1927, 143)³, remained outside the interpretative schemes. F. Noack noted the rock's preservation during the different periods of the sanctuary but he dismissed its importance as a "central motive" in the cult; an opinion expressed as early as the end of the nineteenth century, but later forgotten (Noack 1927, 21 with references). This rock had even been removed from the later plans.

The Z rock is "2-3 feet tall" (Noack 1927, 226) and, according to F. Noack, could be covered with a wooden podium. The measurement of its height in feet is, however, not accurate. Actually, the rock is not small at all: 2 or 3 feet equal 1.10-1.60 m height and was not leveled as it had been done at other places. If it did not have a cult function,

¹ Noack saw all ritual activities only in temple buildings and for this reason he did not agree with the opinions made even in his time that the cave had been the place for the imagined hierogamy.

² Marked as Felskuppe Z on F. Noack's plans.

³ This living rock is preserved in the temple from Pisistratus's time as well as in the building constructed by Ictinus. However, according to Noack, the rock was under a wooden podium and was not seen. In Noack 1927, Taf. 13-16, the rock is marked. In the plan of the Telesterion made in the Roman era, the living rock is missing. In the plans published by F. Noack, all corrections of the living rock had been inserted where the sanctuary was spread out. One can see how the terrain was gradually evened out with the construction of the terraces and new buildings and reconstructions of old buildings. All those details had been removed from the plans published later.

Ictinus wouldn't have hesitated to destroy it. He retained in an architectural way the Mycenaean idea for a hidden ritualism, embedded in his Telesterion project. It is possible that Felskuppe Z is "Mirthless Rock" (Ἀγέλαστος Πέτρα) where, according to the Homeric hymn, Demeter sat down when she came to Eleusis. For F. Noack, however, the place where the Goddess had grieved was not a main marker for the topos of faith around which the sanctuary would have developed. For this reason he did not make an attempt to identify the marker, even though he accepted the Telesterion as an entrance to Hades.

The other sacred place from Eleusis' earliest period was the sacred cave called Plutonium. F. Noack defined it as "a stone and sacred sanctuary," together with the bothros underneath it. The bothros leads to a stone ladder (Noack 1927, 8, 13, 78-81, 218, 267, description of the location; p. 80, description of the ladder leading to the rock bothros; p. 207, description of the entrance). As he noted, the first impression from Eleusis is the big hole in the rock and the small church of St. Panagia over it (Noack 1927, 78, Taf. 6). The cave is located 11 meters above sea level. In the 5th cent. BC, the sacred perimeter was formed with the wall of the terrace. The entrance was from the southeast corner. In the depth of the entrance, there was a door closing the cave to prevent the sacred rituals inside from being seen. Building inscription and traces of sun-dried brick walls are to be found (Noack 1927, 78, Abb. 37, Taf. 5)¹. The temple in front of the cave was built in the second half of the 5th cent. BC. At some places, the blocks were laid directly on the rock; at other places apparently the living rock had been specially shaped. This temple was built over a building from the archaic period. Only small blocks of local Eleusis stone had remained from that building. In the 4th cent. BC, some reconstructions were done. The buildings from the periods listed were built directly over the rock, without any artificial platform being prepared beforehand². During the Roman era, the cave was mortared. A passage belonging to it was also constructed. Rock-cut stairs lead toward the documented bothros in front of the cave (Noack 1927, 79f., Taf. 30, Abb. 38: a plan of the cave from Pisistratus' time).

K. Clinton looked at Ἀγέλαστος Πέτρα in another way. For him, it was a main marker in the Homeric hymn of Demeter, and it played a major role in the beliefs and ritualism of the Eleusis' mysteries. The images with a story line from the Eleusis mysteries collected by the author, and his analysis of Demeter seated on the rock, confirm his opinion (1992, 14, No. 2, 121-123 with references and images; 1986; 1988). Ἀγέλαστος

¹ Noack asked the question whether a human can imagine such walls, but did not provide an answer. The Plutonium does not occupy any space in F. Nock's reconstructions of the mysteries, even though there was a theatre built in front of it. The author discussed in detail the possibility of the Telesterion being the place where the mystes had observed the sacred drama, and discarded it completely by emphasizing that the building had not been made to serve a "scenically-dramatic ritual". And even if such a ritual was practised at the Telesterion, it was observed by different groups according to a pre-defined program. F. Noack could not propose any other place, like the Plutonium, for imagining Kore's exit from Hades. He even could not suppose that the Hierophant might call up only chosen mystes to watch the sacred drama. About the sacred drama at Eleusis see Clinton 1992, 84-89.

² Despite the inscription found, the fundament was only doubtfully identified as a Hekate temple (Travlos 1988, 96). During the Late Antiquity, a wide wall was built in front of the Plutonium (Travlos 1988, 98; see Clinton 1992, 116-120 for the honoring of Hekate at Eleusis).

Πέτρα is presented as an “amorphous rock or a location at a high place, sometimes in an egg-like form.” For this reason, K. Clinton searched for Ἀγέλαστος Πέτρα at the site, despite that the written sources do not specify exactly its place¹. He concluded that the natural seat-throne in the cave, in front of which the space is artificially stair-shaped, had been the correct place where Demeter was sitting (see Clinton 1992, 23, III 4²). The five-meter deep cave was discovered by the French archaeological mission in the 1950s. The cave was an extension of the Plutonium. The remains of coals and bull and sheep sacrifices doubtlessly show that the cave was used for ritual purposes. K. Clinton defined exactly this cave as the perceived entry to Hades.

The Plutonium at Eleusis is a natural cave, the entry to which is located from the east. As I noted before, the stone space in front of the throne is artificially stair-shaped. The cutting in the rock from the west side of the throne is more likely a bench or a shelf. The throne faces east-northeast³. K. Clinton (1992, 32f., Figs. III 4, 5; see No. 43 for the sun-dried brick walls of the space, and No. 49 for the excavations of the French expedition in the 1950s) interpreted the cave itself as Πέτρα.

The strange rock, which is located at the side of the sacred road leading to the Telesterion (made in the Roman era), is in itself another possibility of identifying Ἀγέλαστος Πέτρα. The rock is close to the Roman temple F and F. Noack called it “Felsthesaurus von Temple F” (1927, 269f., Abb. 94, Taf. 32 a-c)⁴. The huge piece of stone is well attached to (inserted into) the terrain of the Temple’s terrace. F. Noack was certain that the rock had nothing to do with the ancient places for sacrificial offerings. He searched for an explanation about the rock in an inscription from 329 BC. The inscription informed of two treasuries. According to F. Noack, this treasury was not comparable to the Delphic one. He sought for the meaning of this “rock treasury” in Pausanias’ text for the πέτρωμα in the city of Pheneas (Paus. 8: 15, 1ff. Rocha-Pereira; see my analysis of the text in Fol 2001). According to him, the entire space described by Pausanias, was not bigger than the “rock treasury” in Eleusis. Thus, F. Noack sought for another ritual meaning of the term. The conscientious drawing of the rock, as well as the author’s description show a rock altar 115 cm high and 180 cm in diameter. A round hollow is dug on the top, 58 cm deep and 53 cm in diameter. According to F. Noack, the circular hollow dug in the rock was covered. Possibly due to the lack of groove around the ope-

¹ Clinton 1992, 14-27 with sources of the mentioning of Ἀγέλαστος Πέτρα and the opinions of the different researchers; see p. 14, No. 7, for the image of Demeter seating on a rock on a red-figure volute-krater, inscription included.

² The throne had been noted under No. 7 of the cave plan. In my opinion, Clinton is right to use F. Noack’s plan, since it is the most detailed one.

³ The rock-cut throne as a place where people believed in the appearance of the Great Mother Goddess is well known in the Phrygian religiousness. The so-called altars (Haspels 1971, 93-96) or thrones (Körte, Körte 1904, 21; Vassileva 1995; Φολ 2002) in Phrygia always face to the east (Haspels 1971, 93). Usually, these rock monuments are part of a complex. They constitute a shaped living rock. Their composition includes a ladder, which leads up to a chair/“throne” with a back. The most important example is the “altar” or the “throne” on the plateau of the “City of Midas”, which also has a two-line inscription on its left side (Haspels 1971, Fig. 28 and the disposition of the site on the map on Fig. 295 6; for the inscription see Vassileva 1995 and 2001).

⁴ Travlos (1988, 97) interpreted temple F as a temple of the new Demeter in the Roman era. It is also considered for one of the treasuries mentioned in the inscription.

ning, he suggested a mushroom-shaped cover¹.

The priest “who carries a stone” Ἱερέυς Λιθοφόρος (Clinton 1974, 98) is a strong indirect proof for the Mycenaean rock Antiquity of Eleusis. The first mentioning of the priest occurred in a decree for the Daduch Themistocles from the year 20/10 BC on lines 15-18 (Clinton 1974, 51). The priest is simultaneously minister of the local gods Zeus Horios, Athena Horia, Poseidon Prosbasterios, and Poseidon Themeliuchos. The next mentioning of the priest was in a dedication from the end of the 2nd cent., where the titular of the inscription is called M. Αὐρήλιος Λιθοφόρος Πρόσδεκτος Πιστοκράτους Κεφαλῆθεν. Another inscription, dated back to the 2nd cent. specified that a seat into the proedria of Dionysus’ theatre had been allocated to “the priest who carries the stone” (ἱερέως λιθοφόρου). According to K. Clinton (1974, 98 with references), the function of this priest is not clear, because the nature of the sacred stone is not known. Later, the author (1992, 122f.) returned to Ἱερός Λίθος in his analysis of the iconography of the Eleusis’ mysteries in order to reconstruct the cult and the myth. He overcame his skepticism regarding the connection between the title and the mysteries (Clinton 1974, 98 with references), and accepted that Λιθοφόρος had been a priest of the mysteries; “and the form of the man’s name, with its allusion to hieronymy, a custom that was practiced only by Eleusinian priests, leaves no doubt” (Clinton 1992, 122, Nos. 7, 8).

I think that the earliest period of Eleusis belongs to the Mycenaean epoch. Except the established Mycenaean constructions, the sanctuary includes a stone ridge with a cave where the throne for the mysterial appearance of god is located. The following things belong to the complex: the bothros near the cave, probably for plant donations; “the rock treasury”, i.e. the rock altar; the sacred spring and the living rock in the corner of the future Telesterion. It is possible that this rock was located in the home-sanctuary of a priest’s family of Eumolpidae and served as a place to take sacred oaths. As Ictinus built a circle in the court of the Telesterion from the 5th cent. BC, he probably kept the sacred location marked with a hearth.

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¹ During Noack’s time the multiple rock altars from this kind on the Bulgarian, Turkish, Macedonian and Greek territory (see Fol 2000) have not yet drawn the attention of the researchers, and the ethnologists had had not yet occupied themselves with the faith in them.

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