CIRCULATION OF HOLY PLACES
This paper illustrates what can be termed the “journey of a name,” one of the many kinds of cultural and material transmission that occurred between early Byzantine Constantinople and the major centers of the province of Italy, which had been taken back from their captors by Justinian’s armies in the fourth and fifth decades of the sixth century. In fact, the monastery of Cosmas and Damian in Constantinople offers a particularly apt case study, as its name was given to three newly founded ecclesiastical establishments in Italy. The latter seem to have had no specific connection with what was claimed as their motherhouse. The name could simply be among the most distinct reflections of a sort of traveling memory.

/Keywords/ Kosmidion, Cosmas and Damian, Santa Maria in Cosmedin, Ravenna, Naples
The starting point: Constantinople

The name Kosmidion is not attested in Byzantine written sources before the early 10th century, although it might well have had an earlier origin. It indicated a complex of a church and a monastery devoted to Cosmas and Damian, the *Anargyroi*, i.e. the two most famous representatives among the ‘unmercenary’ physician saints. Cosmas and Damian allegedly were active in the city of Cyrrhus and were martyred under Diocletian, in 287. As early as the 4th century AD their cult spread from Syria to Jerusalem and across Egypt, always preserving a strong Syriac character. In the 5th century it was to be found attested in a great number of centres around the Mediterranean basin¹.

Cosmas and Damian’s monastery at Constantinople was seemingly located on a hill top on the left bank of the Golden Horn, in a suburban spot just northeast of the eastern edge of the Theodosian city walls. Neither the church nor the adjoining buildings have been preserved. Nor indeed is any archaeological evidence known of, so we can only rely upon written sources to trace out their rough location.

Around the mid-6th century Procopius describes the suburban sanctuary of Cosmas and Damian as situated on a steep hill on the Golden Horn shoreline, in the vicinity of the Blachernae district (present-day Ayyansaray). This latter district clustered around the most famous shrine of the Mother of God in the capital city, erected in the 460’s–470’s². Consequently, scholars tried to find a suitable location for the Kosmidion along the stretch of shore between Ayyansaray and Eyüp. A traditionally accepted identification Kosmidion-Eyüp was partly discarded by recent studies, since it does not fit – from a morphological point of view – with Procopius’ reference to a hill. Moreover, Cyril Mango underlined the fact that both the *Chronicon Paschale* and the account of the *Miracles* of the two saints located Kosmidion in

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the Blachernae/Ayvansaray district. Thus, a location on the hills slightly north of Ayvansaray was suggested /Fig. 1/. This topographic connection would prove significant from the point of view of the ‘export’ of the place names.

Wherever the shrine of Cosmas and Damian actually was, written sources like the Patria, Theophanes and Patriarch Nicephorus tell us that it had been built on a suburban estate called “τὰ Παυλάινης”4. Even if we have no information about the Paulina after whom the estate was named, it seems likely that a lady of this name was the original owner: Cyril Mango suggested that she could have been an aristocrat of Syrian origin who established a place of worship in her own suburban dwelling6. With all likelihood this was the ‘humble church’ that was about to be rebuilt by Justinian I in the first half of the 6th century.

What was the occasion for the rebuilding? Procopius (De aedificiis, I.6) tells us that Justinian himself, having fallen ill with the insurrection of plague in AD 542, was in a desperate situation. All the therapies having proved ineffectual, he finally recovered thanks to the miraculous intervention of Cosmas and Damian, who visited him in a dream. As a consequence of his healing, Justinian transferred their relics from Cyrrhus to the church at Constantinople, rebuilding it on a larger scale. Whoever has lost the hope of healing – Procopius tells us – nowadays pays a visit to the sanctuary, approaching it by boat. It appeared to the seafarers on the top of a sort of ‘acropolis’, thanks to the steep slope of the hill where it stood4. So the Emperor eagerly promoted the cult of the two doctor saints renovating or building new churches at Constantinople and Antioch. As for his successor, Justin II (565–578), he too founded a second shrine in honour of the physician saints at Constantinople, in the nearby of the quarters called ta Basiliskou and ta Dareiou7.

The pilgrimage of sick people is closely linked to the ancient tradition of the healing cult in the area of Blachernae. Seemingly, the Christian shrine of Cosmas and Damian replaced an ancient sanctuary of the Dioscuri8, thus allowing a continuity for the incubation practice, which traditionally took place in it, and which is clearly reflected by the account of Justinian’s dream. A detailed description of the healing cult at Kosmidion is provided by the Byzantine accounts of the Miracles performed by the two doctor saints9. Being closely linked to St. Mary of Blachernae, the Kosmidion may have shared with this latter the constant flow of pilgrims: the text of the Miracles clearly reasserts the links between the cult of St. Mary and the healings achieved through the supernatural intervention of Cosmas and Damian10.

Justinian’s new shrine didn’t last long. It was severely damaged both by the Avaro–Slavic raids in the hinterland of Constantinople in 623 and by the failed siege they attempted on the city in collaboration with the Persians in 62611. The complex seems nevertheless to have survived, for a church of Saints Cosmas and Damian in τὰ Παυλάινης was recorded as functioning as a burial place during the stormy events which accompanied the overthrow of the Emperor Justinian II in the year 71112. Thenceforth, due to the fortification of the Blachernae complex by Emperor Heraclius, the Kosmidion remained permanently outside the city’s defence system. In fact, mention of the sanctuary can be once again found during the early 9th-century Bulgarian siege of Constantinople. Then, in 813, the troops of the khan Kroum encamped in the monastery precinct, certainly exploiting the morphology of the hill from which commanded a view of the capital city and the Golden Horn13.

A certain decline seems to have affected the monastery from the early 7th century to the 11th-century revival of the sanctuary owed to the patronage of Emperor Michael IV (1034–1041), who chose the Kosmidion as his own retirement and burial place14.

We can imagine that, until 626, both the church and the monastic community rapidly increased their wealth mainly thanks to the establishment of a xenodocheion, or a charitable foundation to be housed in what was the former residence of Paulina. It seems likely – even if this is only a hypothesis – that the popular name Kosmidion became widespread due precisely to the enhancement of the prestige of the charitable institution pursued by Justinian, who aimed to show his imperial philanthropy and euergesia15. This could be the case of the passage in the text of Miracles of Cosmas and Damian 47,57–8 pertaining to the “ιερας” of the “μονή Κοσμίδιου”16. Unfortunately, it is quite difficult to point out the chronology of the different parts of the text of the Miracles of Cosmas and Damian17. If we could consider 47,57–8 as belonging to the earlier phase of the text’s editing, i.e. the one contemporary with the spread of the two martyrs’ cult, we could rely upon a pre-7th-century occurrence of the name. Admittedly, it is to be recognized that the
first ever mention of the name Kosmidion in Byzantine literary sources dates back to ca. 859/860, when Symeon Magister (Chronikon, 131,22) reports the existence of a “προσκύνητον Κοσμίδιον”, belonging to Bardas the kaisar. Evidently, in the 9th century the name Kosmidion gradually began to prevail – in the learned milieu as well – on the old place name τά Πιουλίνης. Needless to say, the name Kosmidion should have already been in use before, according to the 8th-century evidence of transmission of its derivate forms in an area as far from Constantinople as the Italian peninsula.

Rome, Ravenna, Naples:

In the 8th century the place-name Kosmidion made its first appearance in the former territories of the Byzantine Exarchate of Italy. The long and detailed biography of Pope Hadrian I (772–795) in the Liber Pontificalis includes the first reference to a Kosmidion in Rome. This energetic leader of the Roman Church restored the diaconia devoted to the Virgin Mary “quae appellatur Cosmidin”, today S. Maria in Cosmedin. It is not clear when the diaconia was actually built. Nonetheless, it is a matter of fact that it was established in part of a late-antique rectangular colonnaded hall, seemingly a sort of wide portico facing the ancient Forum Boarium (Fig. 2).

As for the dedication to the Mother of God, we cannot forget the original link between Kosmidion and the Blachernae. In Byzantine and post-Byzantine Italy, this link would be transformed, as we will see, in the recurring association between edifices devoted to the Mother of God and the appellation Cosmedin.

A Latin epigraph of the 8th century still preserved in the medieval porch of S. Maria in Cosmedin belonged to the ancient diaconia: it dates back to the very end of the Byzantine imperial rule in Rome and Central Italy. Even if no specific mention of the name in Cosmedin was included in the text, we can see the last Byzantine doux, Eustathius (752–756), along with his brother, the gloriosissimus Georgius, richly endowing the diaconia of the Virgin Mary the Mother of God with a great number of estates

4 And not Τὰ Πιουλίνων: discussion about the erroneous reading in Mango, "On the Cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian" (n. 1), p. 190.
5 Mango went so far as to invoke the Paulina mother of the usurper Leonius (484–488), who is said to have been of Syrian or Isaurian origin. Consequently, in Mango’s opinion she built the church complex no later than 480. Mango, "On the Cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian" (n. 1), p. 191.
8 Albrect Berger, Untersuchungen zu den Patria Constantinopolis, Bonn 1988, p. 672.
10 Cf. also the sharing of the sacred bath, the lousma, of the Blacherna see Mango, "On the Cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian" (n. 1), p. 191.
13 Panos Sophoulis, Byzantium and Bulgaria, 775–831, Leiden 2011, p. 251f. The same happened during the failed siege led by the usurper Thomas the Slave in 922: Berger, Untersuchungen (n. 8), p. 672.
18 Despite the location outside the walls, which exposed the district to assaults, pillages and raids, the pleasant landscape and healthy environs made the estates of the proastien attractive and a target for the aristocratic class: Symonios Magistri et Logothete Chronicon, Stephanus Wahlgren ed., Borolini et Novi Eboraci 2006, p. 242.
19 Liber Pontificalis, Louis Duchesne ed., Paris 1955, p. 507. With only one necessary exception, the present-day version of the name: “in Cosmedin” will be used throughout the paper.
located in the suburbs. Eustathius himself acts as the 

*dispensator* of the charitable institution\textsuperscript{21}. This latter fact reflects the actual cooperation between laymen and the Church in welfare administration or – to a broader extent – the reality of the involvement of the Byzantine authorities in the establishment and management of new ecclesiastical foundations, subsequently listed as *diaconiae*, in the main urban centres of Italy\textsuperscript{22}. Whilst Eustathius’ text is in Latin, the patrons’ names are undoubtedly Greek, evidence of a still vital Greek presence well into the 8\textsuperscript{th} century.

When Hadrian I converted S. Maria in Cosmedin into a three aisled basilica with apses, his biographer in the *Liber Pontificalis* played on the name “Cosmedin”, using it as if it meant something like ‘well built’, ‘well decorated’, or ‘orderly’ (in Greek: *kosmitos*), a clear misunderstanding on the part of a Latin-speaking man – a learned man, whose knowledge, as one would have expected, was not broad enough to include the Kosmiodion shrine of Constantinople.

The *diaconia* of S. Maria in Cosmedin was located in that area of the city of Rome which had mostly been populated by Easterners since late antiquity. This quarter spread along the eastern bank of the Tiber, under the slopes of both the Palatine hill and the Aventine, and was significantly named *Ripa Graeca*. There traditionally gathered all those minorities considered by the autochthones as being Greek-speakers – *Graeci* –, i.e. Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians, Sicilians, etc\textsuperscript{23}. Thus, reading the well-known 8\textsuperscript{th}-century *Itinerary* of Einsiedeln, we find that S. Maria in Cosmedin is called the “aeclesia graecorum”, further evidence of its role as one of the most important churches belonging to the Easterners\textsuperscript{24}.

Since, after 554, Byzantine forces finally reconquered Rome, the newcomers (mainly military officers and civil servants, but tradesmen as well) to some extent reinforced the foundation of the new churches and monasteries dedicated to eastern saints (Theodore, George, Sergius and Bacchus, Euphemia, etc.) across the Ripa Greca, the slopes of the Palatine, and the Aventine. Some place names of Constantinopolitan origin were imported as well, a phenomenon which eventually proved to be ephemeral\textsuperscript{25} but which also affected the other two major centres of Byzantine Italy, i.e. Ravenna and Naples, although the latter only to a somewhat lesser degree.

The Blachernae monastery of Constantinople, for instance, was reduplicated at Ravenna, probably during the first half of the 7\textsuperscript{th} century, choosing an extramural area in the Caesarea district\textsuperscript{26}, which might have recalled the location of the original shrine /Fig. 3/. The monastery at Ravenna was donated an altar cover by the exarch Theodore II, who ruled ca 678–687, and played an active part in the diplomatic appeasement between Pope Agatho (678–681) and the Emperor Constantine IV during the Monothelite crisis\textsuperscript{27}. Theodore was later buried, together with his wife Ageta, in the church he had richly endowed\textsuperscript{28}. The information is provided by Andreas Agnellus, the 9\textsuperscript{th}-century author of the *Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*, who was the abbot (*hegoumenos*) of our Blachernae monastery in Caesarea.
Symmetrical relationships between Constantinople and Ravenna are obviously not limited to the Blachernae monastery. As far as we are concerned, the Kosmidion also gave its name to a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Ravenna, which, however, was not a new foundation but derived from the conversion (reconciliation) of the Arian Baptistery. The conversion of the former Arian building to the Catholic rite probably occurred around 560/561 or a little later\(^2\), preserving its dependence on the nearby church of St. Theodore, the former Arian cathedral (today S. Spirito). It is difficult to ascertain when the Arian Baptistery was actually separated from its cathedral to become an autonomous church, which was subsequently conceded to a monastic community of eastern origin /Figs. 3, 5/\(^3\).

What is certain is that the new dedication to S. Maria in Cosmedin is first attested in a document dating back to 767, in which a certain Eudocia made an endowment to the monastery\(^4\). Around 830, Abbot Andreas Agnellus' Liber Pontificalis ascribes the conversion of the baptistery to his homonym Archbishop Agnellus (556–570). He tells us that it became the church of the monastery of the Virgin Mary, the so-called "Cosmi", and considers it necessary to provide his readers with the same false etymological explanation used in Rome to account for the pecular and unusual name Cosmedin, translating it as 'elegant', 'harmonious' like the world. For "cosmos is the word the Greeks use for 'world'"\(^5\). The reference to the linguistic discrepancy between Latin and Greek can be understood once again from the point of view of a Latin-speaker in the predominantly

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23 Individuals of 'Greek' origin in Ravenna seemingly belonged to the so-called Schola Graeca. The name is recorded for the first time in a papyrus dating back to the year 572. Jean-Marie Santerre (Les moines grecs et orientaux à Rome aux époques byzantine et carolingienne, vol. II, Bruxelles 1982, pp. 102–104, note 388) underlined the unclear original nature and significance of the institution. As far as Ravenna is concerned, Salvatore Cosentino in his Storia dell'Italia bizantina (VI–XI secolo). Da Gaustunano a Normann, Bologna 2008, p. 68 considers the schola as an elite of learned Greek-speaking physicians.

24 See Stefano Del Lungo, Roma in età carolingia e gli scritti dell'Anonimo Augiense (Einsiedeln, Bibliotheca Monastirii Ordinis Sancti Benedicti, 326 [8 Nr. 13], IV, ff. 67v–86r), Roma 2004, pp. 61, 112.


29 Ibidem, pp. 178, 182.

30 Cosentino, Storia dell'Italia bizantina (n. 23), pp. 325, 362.


Latin culture of 9th-century Ravenna. In all evidence, Kosmidion/Cosmedin was a name whose etymology was by now completely effaced.

S. Maria in Cosmedin in Ravenna, too, despite the lack of evidence, was probably a diaconia or, at least, a xenodocheion. The community of monks very likely benefited – as was the case of Eudocia’s endowment – from the patronage of the Greek-speaking aristocracy and from direct episcopal intervention. For instance, when Bishop Sergius (744–769), a staunch supporter of the autonomy of the local Church against Popes Stephen II and Paul I, came back to Ravenna around 757 after being imprisoned for three years in Rome, he went to celebrate the mass in the monastery which was by now completely effaced.

The evidence for a cult of St. Nicholas attached to S. Maria in Cosmedin should not be dismissed lightly. At Rome too, though much more later, Pope Nicholas I (858–867) annexed an episcopal residence (secretarium) to S. Maria in Cosmedin, providing it with an oratory (that has since disappeared) named after his patron saint “Nicholas, the martyr of Christ”34. A possible reminiscence of the topography of Constantinople could therefore be taken into account. In the Byzantine capital, an independent monastery of St. Nicholas at Blachernae was severely damaged during the Avaro-Persian siege of 626, together with that of Cosmas and Damian. The two complexes lay at a very short distance from each other. Officially, the Monastery of St. Nicholas was in fact included in the Blachernae district35. Thus, the memory of this faraway topography may have left some slight trace in the altars and oratories of St. Nicholas annexed to the two churches of S. Maria in Cosmedin at Rome and Ravenna /Fig. 6/.

If, so far, the sources had not reported a status of diaconia for the monastery of Ravenna, on the contrary, S. Maria in Cosmedin at Naples can rely upon several 11th and 12th-century documents affirming its true nature as a charitable institution of oriental origin. The first ever mention of it is to be found in the Chronicon episcoporum of the Neapolitan Church,
very likely composed in the 840’s. There we are told that the relics of the 3rd-century Bishop Eustathius had recently been laid to rest in the altar of the church of S. Maria “que dicitur Cosmid”36. Furthermore, a document dated 1017 mentions a plot of land belonging to the “diaconia Sanctae Marie Cosmid”.37 The church survived up to our own day as a diaconia with the name of Santa Maria di Porta Nuova, and was attributed to the original group of seven diaconiae of the early medieval Duchy of Naples /Fig. 4/.38 As was often remarked, the vitality of such a kind of monk-managed charitable institution at Naples – attested since the time of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) – was assured once again by the notable ‘eastern’ features that the Neapolitan ecclesiastical administration still showed during the 10th century39. The evidence – for instance – of a bilingual liturgy at Naples can be traced up to the 14th century: documents demonstrate that the primicerius of our S. Maria in Cosmedin, along with other Greek-speaking clergies, still has the duty to read the holy writ in Greek in the cathedral during Holy Saturday and the Easter-day40.

40 Ambrasi, “Le diaconie a Napoli” (n. 38), pp. 56–57.
Conclusion

A recent article by Phil Booth provided us with an in-depth investigation of the multi-doctrinal perspectives emerging from the exegesis of the text of the Miracles of Cosmas and Damian. He showed how the pilgrims and the individuals benefiting from the healing practices or the miracles of the two physician saints belonged to different doctrinal orientations. Apparently, while distinctions were often made throughout the texts between orthodox and heretics or even pagans, the authors of the different collections of miracles’ tales were of different extraction and opinions. Mainly in the first stages of the composition of the Miracles’ texts, an anti-Chalcedonian element seems evident.

Once we assume the likely Syrian origin of at least part of the original community at Kosmidion in the 5th century, the influence of the Miaphysite doctrines can be easily understood. Nevertheless, as Booth rightly indicated, the earlier hagiographic texts of the Miracles should have undergone substantial revisions and remodelling after the imperial intervention in the management of the Anargyroi cult, i.e. after the creation of the two great shrines at Constantinople by Justinian and Justin II. The existence of various doctrinal elements in the accounts of the Miracles relating to the shrine at Constantinople (especially in the Coptic corpus published by Rupprecht in 1935) is a probable reflection of the multifaceted Kosmidion community and mark of the somewhat ambiguous religious politics adopted by Justinian I. In the capital, the Anargyroi cult was definitely enhanced as an imperial one, faithfully reflecting the very nature of the Emperor’s religious way of thinking. These policies probably came to an abrupt end with Justin II, who publicly displayed a harsh attitude towards non-Chalcedonians, even going as far as occasional persecution.

After a long period in which Emperors like Maurice and Phocas avoided raising the issue of the doctrinal controversies, in 616 Heraclius made a first – short-lived – attempt at reconciliation between Chalcedonians and anti-Chalcedonians. Heraclius aimed to restore religious unity, being pressed by the difficulties of foreign policy and, generally speaking, by the centrifugal trends of the anti-Chalcedonians. The attempt at union lead to negative reactions on the part of both the sides due to its monenergetic formula. In particular, the union found its tireless opponents in the most active Chalcedonians personalities, among whom we find Sophronius the Sophist, the future Patriarch of Jerusalem. He wrote, some time after 603, the Account of the Miracles of St. Cyrus and John, the two physician saints who operated at their own shrine at Menouthis/Abukir in Egypt. Sophronius’ work, written after his eye had been healed thanks to the miraculous intervention of the two saints, is well acquainted with some of the earlier texts of the Miracles of Cosmas and Damian. A new type of rhetoric, nevertheless, inspired Sophronius. When they are said to be ‘heretics’, i.e. anti-Chalcedonians, Cyrus and John’s patients have to repent before they can be healed. Thus, the various and syncretistic ambience of the first miracles of Cosmas and Damian and of the pilgrimage at Kosmidion appears to be by now totally a thing of the past.

The disapproval among the Chalcedonian milieu of the ‘conciliatory’ religious politics of Heraclius together with the propaganda of Chalcedonian activists like Sophronius against the compromiser politic of the Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, a man of Syrian origin, and probably the son of Jacobite parents. Many Syrian Dyophysites clerics and monks fled from Syria and the city of Jerusalem.
occupied by the Persians in 614, which shocked all the contemporaries enormously. They went to settle definitively in Italy, substantially increasing the number of the existing ‘Greek’ ecclesiastic community. In Italy, the Roman Church cooperated closely with these ‘eastern’ monastic communities in severely condemning the monoenergist compromise.

Often substantially in agreement with the doctrinal position of the Church of Rome, the authorities of the Exarchate, and the Duchies as well, provided all the opponents of the religious politics of Constantinople with a safe refuge.

This might be the historical framework in which a dissolution of the original monastic community of the Kosmidion could have taken place. The shocking episode of the year 626, i.e. the looting of the shrine by the Avaro-Persian besiegers, should be taken into account as a further discouraging element.

The Italian ‘replicas’ of the Kosmidion of Constantinople were probably the result of a large-scale emigration of monks from the main shrine of Cosmas and Damian at Constantinople. They were well experienced in the management of hospitals and charitable activity for the benefit and welfare of the impoverished population of the great cities. In Italy, at least one of the main features of the original Kosmidion was preserved: the new diaconiae of S. Maria in Cosmedin were probably led by a community of monks who took care of the poor and offered hospitality and food thanks mainly to the patronage of wealthy individuals. The monks carried out the normal incumbencies of the diaconitai. They decided to settle in the three main centres of the Exarchate of Italy, i.e. the capital Ravenna and the duchies of Rome and Naples. Once arrived, they met the flourishing communities of Greek-speaking Easterners, ready to become an active part of them.

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41 Booth, “Orthodox and Heretic” (n. 7), pp. 118–120.
42 The conciliatory policy was promoted in the following years by means of recurrent subscriptions of union documents by some anti-Chalcedonians in Syria and Egypt: Sophronius of Jerusalem and Seventh-Century Heresy: The Synodical Letter and Other Documents, Pauline Allen ed., Oxford 2009, p. 24ff.
43 Ibidem, p. 18.
44 Booth, “Orthodox and Heretic” (n. 7), p. 123.
46 Kaeği, Heraclius (n. 11), p. 79ff.
47 Sophronius of Jerusalem (n. 42), pp. 18–19.
What emerges immediately when analysing the phenomenon of the transfer of the name Kosmidion into the Exarchate of Italy is the lack of connection between the Italian diaconiae of S. Maria in Cosmedin and the cult of the Physician saints, in Rome, Ravenna and Naples alike. The name Kosmidion/Cosmedin was consequently deprived of its original and basic meaning. If anything survived from the Constantinopolitan motherhouse, it is the true establishment as diaconiae of the three churches devoted to S. Maria in Cosmedin on Italian soil. Apparently, the migrant diakonitai monks who gave origin to the Italian diaspora of the Kosmidion simply wanted to preserve the Constantinopolitan name as a mark of identity for their community. The erroneous understanding of the name’s meaning in a mainly Latin-speaking cultural environment played its role as well. Kosmidion/Cosmedin evidently became popular thanks to its mistaken but suggestive interpretation as ‘ornament’ or ‘adorned’. It would be intriguing to imagine that the monks, since they lost the bond with their patron saints Cosmas and Damian, found in the place-names the most suitable way to reassert, nostalgically, their provenance from Constantinople.

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