

**VALORIZING HISTORICAL ARCHIVES FOR THE TOURIST
PROMOTION OF A TERRITORY: A FIELD RESEARCH BETWEEN
ALBANIA AND ITALY¹**

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Abstract

This article presents the initial findings of an ongoing field research project on the potential for tourist promotion of historical archives and their documentation in Italy and Albania. The starting hypotheses concern both the possibility of benefitting from accessing historical archives as an inseparable and unique entity (that is to say, a complex of documents and the place intended for their deposit) and the possibility of using archival documentation for the tourist enhancement of a specific territory.

Through the study of some best practices to enhance and promote historical archives hosted in state, municipal, public and private institutions in the two countries, we have identified several types of effective and engaging proposals in different contexts, (but not only) thanks to the use of digital technologies. Furthermore, the historical documentation concerning a specific community and territory could be used to enhance their productive excellences, create thematic itineraries, and enrich the cultural offer for visitors, although preserved in archives that are physically distant from the territory itself. The conclusion of the study, our proposal for promoting a territory through archival records is aimed at the city and region of Korça, with the design of a multimedia path on some present and past productive excellences, a path in which the results of our investigation will be intersected with the historical research carried out by one of the project's managers.

Keywords: *archives, historical archives, tourism, Italy, Albania, Korça.*

¹The research project initiated between the Fan S. Noli University of Korça (Albania) - scientific coordinator Metin Venxha - and the CNR Institute of History of Mediterranean Europe (based in Rome) - scientific coordinator Geltrude Macrì - was selected for the two-year period 2023-2024 within the framework of the Bilateral Scientific Cooperation Agreement between the National Research Council (Italy) and the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Albania (Albania). Metin Venxha is author of sections 2 and 3, Geltrude Macrì of 1, 4, 5; Idamaria Fusco of 6; Olga Lo Presti of 7 and 8.

VLERËSIMI I ARKIVAVE HISTORIKE PËR PROMOVIMIN TURISTIK TË NJË TERRITORI: NJË HULUMTIM I KËSAJ FUSHE MES SHQIPËRISË DHE ITALISË

Abstrakt

Ky artikull paraqet gjetjet fillestare të një projekti hulumtues për vlerësimin e potencialit të promovimit turistik të arkivave historike dhe dokumentimit të tyre në Itali dhe Shqipëri. Hipotezat fillestare lidhen me mundësinë e përfitimit nga hulumtimet në arkiva historike si një entitet i padiskutueshëm dhe unik (d.m.th. një kompleks dokumentesh dhe vendi i tyre për depozitim) dhe mundësinë e përdorimit të dokumentimit arkivist për përmirësimin turistik të një territori të caktuar.

Duke studiuar disa praktika të mira për të theksuar dhe promovuar arkivat historike të strehuara në institucione shtetërore, komunale, publike dhe private në dy vendet, kemi identifikuar disa lloje propozimesh efektive dhe tërheqëse në kontekste të ndryshme (por jo vetëm), falë përdorimit të teknologjive digjitale. Po ashtu, dokumentacioni historik, lidhur me një komunitet dhe territor të caktuar, mund të përdoret për të krijuar itinerare tematike dhe për të pasuruar ofertën kulturore për vizitorët, edhe pse i ruajtur në arkiva që janë fizikisht larg territorit të tyre.

Përfundimi i studimit, propozimi ynë për promovimin e një territori përmes regjistrave arkivore është i orientuar në qytetin dhe rajonin e Korçës, me hartimin e një rruge ku rezultatet e hulumtimit tonë do të përplasen me kërkimet historike të kryera nga një prej menaxherëve të projektit.

Fjalë kyçe: arkiva, arkiva historike, turizëm, Itali, Shqipëri, Korça.

1. Materials. Valorization and Promotion of Archives: Theory and Practice

“Archives are the documentary by-product of human activity retained for their long-term contribution to individual and community memory,” regardless of the multiplicity of formats (paper, digital, etc.) in which they were created. Formulated within the International Council on Archives, this general definition effectively expresses the potential value that archives hold for the citizens of every country (<https://www.ica.org/discover-archives/what-are-archives/>).

Based on these premises, our research is based on an awareness of the role that archival documentation also plays in recognizing the rights of individuals and communities, as well as human rights themselves (Giuvà, 2007, pp. 136-137). Communicating the “values of the archive, even before its contents,” outside the narrow circle of specialists who know and frequent them - primarily archivists and historians - could help achieve the desirable goal of raising society’s awareness of the importance of preserving archives in all stages of their formation. At the same time, promoting the knowledge of historical archives (understood as documentary complexes destined for preservation, places of deposit, and cultural institutions [Carucci, 1995, pp. 20-23]) could attract, as a consequence, human and economic resources for the maintenance of a cultural asset that is usually little visible and little known (Valacchi, 2006, pp. 31, 32).

We therefore present some initial results of an ongoing field research project on the tourist promotion of Albanian and Italian historical archives. The comparison between Italy and Albania is motivated by the following aspects: the extremely close cultural, economic, and political relations that have linked the two sides of the Adriatic Sea for much of the twentieth century (among others: Rosielli, 1986; Mandalà, 2017); the documentary richness of these common contacts preserved in the archives of the two countries (among others: Trani, 2007); and the different characteristics of their respective national archival

systems, which also constitute an interesting object of comparison.

2. The Albanian experience

In Albania, due to a long a 5-century-long Ottoman occupation, the culture of document preservation was weak. The general cultural development of the country during the Ottoman occupation took place with great difficulty because the development and spread of the Albanian language were not tolerated by the High Porte. (Nero, 1999) This created a great vacuum in the establishment of a tradition for the preservation and conservation of documents. In Albania, the first initiative to create a State Archive was made in 1913, immediately after the declaration of independence; however, not even a second attempt was successful until 1932. Until 1944, the existing Albanian archives functioned in a decentralized manner, referring to the respective structures they served. However, it should be mentioned that after 1925, when Ahmet Zogu was elected President of the Republic, the culture of preserving documents and the legal framework for state documents started being implemented.

The entire period after the declaration of Independence, until the end of the World War II, was characterized by the existence of separate sectors responsible for the administration of documents. Analyzing the organograms and bodies of institutions, mainly the central ones of the state administration, it turns out that they were foreseen and functioned as structural units of different levels for working with documents. In some institutions, these units were on par with other functional structural units of the institution. In some other bodies and institutions, they were part of another structure, so they were substructures.

These structures or substructures come with different names, such as directorate, branch, section, office, etc., of the secretariat, protocol, correspondence, proto-archive, library-archive, etc. In either case, structure or substructure, they were responsible for the administration of all documents that were issued by the institution under which they functioned and all the documents that were sent to it by other institutions.

Efforts to create a central archive continued even after World War II. In 1947, the "Documentary Archive of the Institute" was created within the Institute of Studies. It collected a significant amount of historical documents that were stored by state bodies or individuals, thus taking

on the attributes of a Central archive, but not all the characteristics of such a body.

The Central State Archive (AQSH) was created as a central body, although dependent on the Institute of Studies, with the ordinance of the Council of Ministers no. 21, dated August 6. 1949. Its creation marks a culminating moment in the history of Albanian archives.

For the first time, in addition to the archives of the state bodies, the operation of a real archival body with nationwide scope began to function. In 1951, the Central State Archive passed into the subdivision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which it maintained until 1962, when the General Directorate of State Archives (today the General Directorate of Archives) was established under the Council of Ministers. In addition to being a central body, this directorate had and still has the attributes of the Central State Archive, making it the most important and richest archive in the country's archive network.

3. A Comprehensive Overview of the General Directorate of Archives in Albania

The General Directorate of Archives was established in 1949 (AQSH (the Central State Archive), F. 490 (Council of Ministers), V. 1949, D. 501). From an administrative point of view, twelve local State Archives are directly dependent on the General Directorate of Archives, while the archives of the system and those of the same typology depend administratively on the bodies they represent and under which they function (Loli, 2009, p. 15-16). The structural form of this archive has changed depending on the laws on archives that have been updated over the years. In the General Directorate of Archive Studies Hall, researchers are served 25 files a day in three forms: archival, digital, microfilm, and original documents. Unlike other archives in the country, in this archive the ordering of materials is done through the online system on the *katalogu.arkiva.gov.al* site, where each researcher creates his/her own account, orders the files he/she will consult, sets the date on which he/she requests to see the materials, and shows up in the study hall on that specific date. Documents can be ordered for any date, but not later than five days from the date of the order. The documents commissioned by researchers are served in digital form (in the last two years, this indicator has been growing) and less than 10% in the other two forms, microfilm or original, the latter covering a

nearly negligible percentage. The hours of the study hall of the General Directorate of Archives are from Tuesday to Friday, 09:00 - 19:00 and Saturday, 09:00 - 14:00 (Order No. 626, dated November 11, 2022). The General Directorate of Archives has no differentiation in service for scholars of foreign nationality; the latter are equal to Albanian citizens and do not need permission or any special requirement to study in the study halls. The service fees for archival documents are the lowest in the region, and there is no differentiation for foreigners (Order No. 300, dated May 17, 2022).

The average number of students who receive service in the study hall is more than 13 per day. Together with the State Agency of Archives of Kosovo, they publish the magazine "Albanian Archives," and there are several publications with summaries of documents and studies, as well as manuals on archival work. All the above-mentioned archives of the Western Balkan countries, in addition to providing materials that they store and administer for researchers, also offer materials of a social-legal or technical nature. These materials are related to documents that are closely linked to the issues that citizens may encounter, such as: education problems (schools records, teaching programs of various branches, opening and closing of schools/branches/universities, etc.), property problems (top of periods of various, documents of sale and purchase of properties, surface specifications, maps, construction permits and other related documents, personal documents (seniority employment seniority, appointments to work positions, documentation on medals or titles, etc.). Exhibitions are the most widespread form of bringing information with historical content and that arouse curiosity about certain events among citizens and interested parties. They are also one of the limited ways in which we can show people that archives exist and that they are interesting, relevant and useful (G. H. Williams, 2008, p. 201).

During the transition years, there has always been a legal framework on which all the work with the archives is built. Except for Law No. 9154, dated November 6, 2003, several additions and changes have been made. The most important part is the decision of the Council of Ministers No. 35, dated January 24, 2018 on the adoption of the regulation on "Licensing of Private Archives," which was an unregulated area by law and was often subjected to various abuses (VKM No. 35, 2018). The last amendment is law 27/2024, dated April

25, 2024) on some additions and amendments to law 9154, "On Archives," which is more complete and based on the best practices of the European Union (Official Gazette No. 72, p. 8003).

4. The Italian Experience

The organization of collective documentary memory in Italy still reflects the significant polycentrism of the political institutions before Unification. In 1870, a few years after the unification of Italy, a special commission pointed out that archives should be under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior, while also affirming that superintendents should have a certain degree of autonomy in organizing the archives (Lodolini, 1991, p. 137). The supervision of non-state archives was assigned to the superintendencies as early as 1939 (Carucci-Guercio, 2008, p. 18-19; and <https://www.beniculturali.it/ministero>).

Reflecting the conception of the prevailing historical and cultural value of archives, the evolution of legislation led to the passage in 1974-75 of the General Directorate of State Archives (established in 1963) from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Heritage, later reorganized in the Ministry of Culture. Until that period, educational activities and documentary exhibitions aimed at both schools and a wider audience were practically absent in Italian archives, in contrast to the experience already gained in other countries (D'Angiolini-Pavone, 1973, p. 1690). Meanwhile, archivists reflected on cultural initiatives that could be carried out in the archives of local institutions to reach a broader audience, usually unfamiliar with historical research, and proposed the introduction of the concept of "archive promotion," different from that of "enhancing." Enhancement would more properly indicate activities related to conservation, study, reordering of records, and the elaboration of inventories (Carucci, 1995, p. 14); promotion would have the explicit objective of reaching a wide audience and would involve a redefinition of archive management to allow for exhibitions, conferences, the preparation of educational tools for schools, the organization of guided tours, workshops for storytelling, as well as interaction with the world of art and other disciplines (Cerri, 1998). More recently, the Cultural Heritage legislation considers "enhancement" the promotion of heritage and its knowledge (DL 22 January 2004, no. 42, art. 6, https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/dettaglio/codici/beniCulturali/111_0_

1/). Many of the activities hoped for in local archives in the 1990s have now become fully integrated into the cultural proposals of archives. The importance of communication strategies has been also incorporated into the recent reorganization of the Schools of Archival, Paleographic, and Diplomatic Studies of the State Archives. This includes the introduction among the optional disciplines of “Communication and enhancement of archival heritage and construction of institutional websites” (DM, 1 October, 2021, no. 241, https://asmo.cultura.gov.it/fileadmin/risorse/SAPD/DM_01-10-2021_241.pdf).

To study and compare both the different enhancement strategies already implemented and further possible initiatives for tourism development, the starting point was the study of archival locations; as mentioned above, the archive is also the physical place where records are kept. Frequently, in Italy, archives are housed in historical buildings readapted for this purpose (e.g., in the premises of ancient convents with an intrinsic architectural and artistic value) and more rarely in specially designed and built places, such as the Municipal Historical Archive in Palermo, designed by architect Giuseppe Damiani Almeyda between 1881 and 1885 (*Scrigni di storia*, 2022). In many of these premises, the richness of documents and the beauty and grandeur of the rooms come together in a visually striking and impressive whole (<https://dgagaeta.cultura.gov.it/public/uploads/documents/FuoriCollana/62e231b20878a.pdf>).

In recent years, many of these sites have opened their doors to visitors. (Let us recall the recent important initiatives of the “Paper

Sundays” promoted by the Ministry of Culture and, as a further example, the art exhibition set up in the State Archives of Palermo for the 12th “Manifesta. European Nomadic Biennale for Contemporary Art” in 2018 (<http://m12.manifesta.org/videomobile-2018/index.html>).

We selected a number of archives in Italy and Albania which differ in their producers and preservers, in order to have a broad overview of cultural proposals; during the study missions on the field, we met archivists involved in enhancement and promotion of initiatives at the following institutes: the Albanian Central State Archives and the Sigurimi Archives in Tirana; the State Archive of Rome, housed in the magnificent complex of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza built in the 17th century by the architect Francesco Borromini; the Capitoline Historical

Archive in Rome, housed in Borromini's monumental complex of the Oratory of the Philippine Fathers; the Historical Archive of the Bank of Italy, where a project of virtual study room has been recently realized; the Central State Archive, for its location in the Rome EUR district and the recent opening of a museum route within some parts of the documentary deposits. Other study missions are planned at the Municipal Archives of Elbasan and the State Archives, the State Archive in Naples², and the Historical Archives of the Bank of Naples (located in the 16th-century Palazzo Ricca and the adjoining Palazzo Cuomo³). The field observations were accompanied by bibliographic research to compare the ways in which the two countries differ in organizing their collective documentary memory and to historically contextualize the identified record sources concerning the city and territory of Korça.

Indeed, the Korça region has been identified as the main beneficiary of one of the project's deliverables: the development of a multimedia exploration that showcases the region's productive achievements, both historical and contemporary, as interpreted through the lens of Albanian and Italian archival records. This communications project is designed for a wide audience and aims to develop a comprehensive strategy to enhance the historical and cultural legacy of the initiative, making it both accessible and attractive to the public.

6. Results. What types of activities?

The results of the observations and study are heterogeneous, just like the cultural institutes considered, due to the diversity of their histories, different architectural characteristics, the documentation they preserve, access methods, the specific skills of the professionals working there and, last but not least, the economic resources available.

The Historical Archive of the Secret Police in Tirana is for obvious reasons, not suited for not suited for any possible tourist promotion initiatives. However, we wanted to include it among our case studies for the very high quality of its communication projects. In the catalogues and reference leaflets for the documentary exhibitions, the skillful use of news and images creates emotionally engaging storytelling.

²www.archiviodistatonapoli.it/

³www.fondazionebanconapoli.it/archivio/

Leveraging interactive technologies and social media platforms is a growing area for improving archive accessibility. By utilizing apps, augmented reality, and virtual tours, archives can connect with a wider and more diverse audience. Concurrently, social media provide a more diverse platform for the dissemination of historical documents, interesting facts, and detailed analyses, thereby fostering active participation within the online community.

Thematic exhibitions, displays of documents bearing particular historical and artistic value, educational visits for schools, and open days for citizens are among the main promotional activities aimed at a wide audience carried out at the State Archives in Tirana. Documentation has also been enhanced through the creation of twenty-two archive points in Albania allowing remote access to the central archive. Other similar points have been set up in the Balkan area and in Italy, at the University of Calabria and the University of Palermo.

The State Archive in Tirana preserves a wealth of ancient documentation in various languages, including Ottoman and Persian. Some of these precious documents have been faithfully reproduced using new technologies, to preserve copies of the original. These copies have mostly been reproduced by Chinese craftsmen. These reproductions are incredibly similar to the originals and, for this reason, hold great economic value due to the precious materials (such as gold) being used.

In Rome, the State Archive offers an “Educational Service” which organises a wide range of educational visits and “experiences”, involving students in activities such as the creation of artefacts and storytelling (<https://archiviodistatoroma.cultura.gov.it/didattica/>); some areas of the monumental complex of Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza are open to the public, while in the Biblioteca Alessandrina hall artistic exhibitions are set up, inspired by the archival documentation, offering a further element of attraction for non-specialists. The Archivio Storico Capitolino also offers educational itineraries and a section of the “digital archive” for remote consultation. Additionally, the Historical Archive of the Bank of Italy has established a virtual study room, *l’Aura*, for remote consultation of a substantial portion of its digitized documentation (<https://www.bancaditalia.it/servizi-cittadino/servizi/accesso-asbi/l-aura/index.html>).

Finally, a permanent exhibition on the history of Italy was inaugurated

in 2023 at the Central State Archive in Rome. This exhibition also occupies part of the storerooms; texts, images and objects are displayed among the shelves containing hundreds of envelopes and files from the same historical period, in a setting of great visual impact (<https://acs.cultura.gov.it/lo-scrigno-della-memoria/>).

The Neapolitan archives also offer interesting insights for tourism purposes. The State Archives in Naples are housed in the beautiful Benedictine monastery of Saints Severino and Sossio. They preserve a very rich documentary heritage relating to the history of southern Italy before the Unification. Anyone wishing to study far-flung Italian regions such as Calabria or Abruzzo, for example, cannot do it without visiting this archive. However, the archive is not just a place for scholars. Today, it is opening up more and more to the general public, thanks to exhibitions and events of various kinds, such as the recent, immersive exhibition on Pablo Picasso (*Pasión Picasso*), attracting a wide and varied public. This is part of the idea of an archive that is no longer just a destination for a few scholars, secluded within their papers and research, but a place open to all. Furthermore, new technologies are applied to the study and discovery of historical sources. New media are employed as well in another important Neapolitan archive, the *Archivio Storico del Banco di Napoli* (<https://www.fondazionebanconapoli.it/archivio/en/>), an archive unique in the world for its wealth of banking documentation. Far from being a fruitless collection of account and figures, it is a vast array of documents that offer researchers and visitors the opportunity to make discoveries that are often unimaginable. The archive is often visited by art historians who reconstruct the lives, works and commissions of important artists. It is no coincidence that, at the headquarters of the Archive, in the rooms of the Fondazione del Banco di Napoli, it is possible to admire a famous painting by Caravaggio, *The Taking of Christ*, from the Ruffo collection, on display until mid-June.

Caravaggio animates some of the stories preserved in the museum “*Il Cartastorie*”, built with the help of the rich bank documentation. The museum is a very interesting example of enhancing historical documentation for the general public and, therefore, of exploiting an archival site for tourism purposes. The atmosphere one breathes when entering rooms with walls covered in ancient documents, the multimedia reconstruction, through storytelling processes, of events

from the past, brought to life thanks to new technologies, is a significant example of what these archival sites can offer to a public of users interested in immersing themselves in the past and helping to reconstruct it. The documentation of this archive has been considered a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and has won numerous awards such as the Corporate Heritage Awards 2020 and 2022; the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage *Europa Nostra* Awards 2017; the International Financial Cultural Heritage Award and the Culture + Enterprise Award 2016.

7. Discussion of results.

The opening of the archives to a wide public of non-specialists is now a reality that is reflected in diverse cultural proposals that take place in the archives; documentary or artistic exhibitions, workshops and educational visits are the most common activities.

Promotional activities are designed on the specific features of each archive, but are also potentially replicable in other archives - for example, the “experiences” carried out in the State Archives of Rome could be replicated in the State Archives of Tirana, a repository of ancient and valuable documents).

Web 2.0 and even more Web 3.0 technologies are radically changing the way users/visitors interact, find information online and get involved in cultural activities. The cultural heritage sector has strongly implemented the use of these technologies, and archives are using them to reach new users and promote their collections (Krause & Yakel, 2007; Peccatte, 2011; Ridolfo, Hart-Davidson, & McLeod, 2010). The use of technology to digitize the physical documents stored in archives represents a best practice for preservation and use, and it allows remote viewing of the original materials. Its use, however, is also necessary to enable a visitor experience. These experiences connect the public with contexts that are often little known and yet essential for raising awareness of the place in which it is located. (Spallone, R. *et alii*, 2021). Artificial Intelligence (AI) and machine learning are employed in the examination and documentation of cultural heritage. These advanced technologies facilitate the automatic recognition and categorization of cultural items, uncover concealed trends within historical datasets, and forecast the deterioration of materials to schedule preservation efforts. Furthermore, AI enables the crafting of

tailored experiences for visitors, offering virtual guides that customize the exhibition journey according to their individual preferences preferences.

8. Conclusions. Our proposals and further research perspectives

The theoretical reflection of the Archivists and the legislation in force in Albania and Italy have addressed the issue of the enhancement and promotion of historical archives, identifying tasks and responsibilities but, at the same time, leaving a fair margin of initiative in organizing cultural proposals by those who work in the local realities and know their characteristics and critical points inside out. Exhibitions and visits can certainly attract a considerable number of visitors; visits generally take place in the entrance premises and in dedicated rooms with documents displayed, while usually storage rooms are not included in the tour for security reasons.

However, visiting the storage rooms could be an additional attraction for visitors, e.g. along the lines of the Behind the Scenes Tours of the National Archive in London (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/about/visit-us/whats-on/events/>).

Moreover, digitizing documents has become one of the most efficient and commonly adopted methods for improving state archives. This approach not only aids in preserving the materials, minimizing the need for their physical manipulation, but it also greatly increases their accessibility, even in locations that are not yet open to visitors. Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) open new frontiers in the exploration of archival heritage, allowing for immersive experiences that transcend the physical limitations of exhibition spaces. Through AR, users can view historical reconstructions or contextual information overlaid on the real view of a site or an object. Conversely, VR offers virtual journeys from afar, making the document accessible to those who cannot physically visit these locations.

The second step of our research initiative focusing on archival documentation in Italy and Albania concerning the territory of Korça represents a multifaceted opportunity to promote cultural and economic development. This research can serve as a central resource in several ways:

- *Promotion of local production excellence*: Documentation can uncover historical and current production techniques and activities unique to Korça. By highlighting this excellence, the region can build its reputation in specific sectors, attract investment and enhance local pride and craftsmanship. This could lead to the revival of traditional methods or the promotion of niche products to a wider market.
- *Enriching the cultural offer for visitors*: Using archival research to inform the creation of exhibitions, museums, cultural events and interactive experiences can significantly enhance the cultural landscape of Korça for visitors. This could include digital experiences such as augmented reality tours that bring historical events to life, or virtual reality setups that allow visitors to explore archival materials in an immersive environment. Such initiatives can attract a wider audience, including those interested in cultural tourism, educational travel and experiential activities.

Part of the research - which is still in progress and will be the subject of further essays by other researchers of the team - will also focus on the study of food farming and the development of tourist itineraries based on the enhancement of the region's gastronomic traditions.

In addition, this research could facilitate collaboration between cultural institutions, academic bodies, and the tourism sector, promoting a holistic approach to cultural preservation and promotion. Involving the local community in these projects can also ensure that initiatives are based on authentic cultural expressions and contribute to sustainable cultural tourism.

In conclusion, the ongoing research of archival documentation related to the Korça area has the potential to contribute significantly to the cultural and economic vibrancy of the region. By systematically uncovering and utilizing the wealth of historical and cultural information, stakeholders can create innovative and meaningful experiences that celebrate Korça's unique heritage and inspire locals and visitors alike.

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