

Introduction: The History of the “Balkan Family”

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In 1996, the freshly created journal “The History of the Family” devoted its fourth issue to the Balkan Family. It was a valuable drawing up of the balance of existing scholarship on the structural study of the family, and included six articles by ten scholars, almost exclusively from the USA and Austria, together with an introduction on household and family contexts in the Balkans by the editor Karl Kaser, who offered a comparative typology of the various household formation patterns (Kaser 1996).¹ Based on original source material from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, the articles touched centrally or peripherally on the large complex households and the different types of factors—economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental—that contributed to their formation and spread, as well as the presence and ideology of patriarchal family structures. The one exception dealt with the effect of available land on fertility and the exchange of oxen as capital in a regime of scarcity. The articles reflected the different views and debates on the spread of the joint family, specifically the zadruga, and while not skirting over strong differences about the posited uniqueness of the Balkans, there was tentative consent that the area displayed an enormous family diversity, and there is no single type of Balkan family.

In the introduction, Kaser compared the American and Austrian traditions of Balkan anthropology. The American had a longer pedigree, beginning in the 1930s with the work of Philip E. Mosely, “the founder of the American branch of anthropology and social history of the Balkans” (Kaser 1996, p. 377), followed by a next-generation, most prominently the scholarship of Joel Halpern and Eugene Hammel, who conducted extensive ethnographic field work in Yugoslavia, especially around kinship structures, the rural life cycle and the effects of modernization on village life. The Austrian tradition began in the 1980s, attempting to place the Balkans in a comparative European perspective with Michael Mitterauer, who paid special attention to long-term cultural and religious factors. It was continued by Kaser’s work on patriarchy and the joint family, and was de facto institutionalized by Kaser in Graz, producing a whole cohort of researchers on Balkan historical demography.² In many ways, this scholarship stimulated or triggered (through academic specialization) the local interest in historical demography and family history.

Yet, what is usually overlooked is that Mosely (1905–1972) himself was following a local Balkan tradition. Trained as a Slavist, he wrote his dissertation on nineteenth-century Russian diplomacy, and eventually became the leading specialist on Russia and the Soviet Union, being dubbed “The Cold War’s organization man” for his immense influence in shaping American Sovietology (Engerman 2009). Not yet 30, Mosely applied to the Social Science Research Council for a post-doctoral fellowship to study peasant life in the Balkan countries. This is how later he explained his motivation:

“I had two main purposes in mind. Having observed the aftermath of the Revolution and the new revolution of 1928–33 in the Soviet Union, I was anxious to know whether the nearby peoples, as in Rumania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, were similarly vulnerable to the Soviet type of revolution, or whether they had a very distinct character of their own in their national and peasant life . . . My interest in the Balkans goes back to 1929–1930, when I first planned my research on Russian diplomacy in Bulgaria. At this time I had learned to read Bulgarian. Later I added a reading knowledge of Serbo-Croatian and Rumanian, and acquired gradually conversational knowledge in all three” (Mosely 1954, pp. 30–32).



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We are never to know how Mosely had formulated his motivations in the 1930s, as his statement of July 1954 was written at the height of the McCarthyism when he was forced to establish his credentials, being presumed to have a pro-Russian bias. His friend, Margaret Mead, the famous anthropologist, who spoke at Mosely's memorial service in 1972, suggested otherwise: "After he had been awarded a fellowship and had arranged to leave his post at Union College, he was told that he was not to do what he planned but to go instead to London to study demography with Carl Saunders and anthropology with Malinowski and then to go to Romania and study Romanian villages with Gusti. At this time, he felt this was outrageous because he had no training whatsoever in relating his scientific work to living people. This was one of the periods when I saw a good deal of him because he wanted to learn about field work and I had already done a great deal. He had to start absolutely from scratch" (Mead 1972).

No matter what the trigger, what it neatly shows is the inevitable, but rarely symmetrical interdependence, at times symbiosis, between scholarship and politics. In 1935 Mosely headed to Europe and settled in Bucharest where he established close relations with Dimitrie Gusti, the founder of the Romanian School of Sociology and his Royal Romanian Institute of Social Research. At that time Gusti was at the height of his career and international fame. Broadly educated in philosophy, sociology, political economy and law, Gusti was a successful institution builder as well as a prominent member of the National Peasant Party. Between 1925 and 1948 he led the research of Romanian villages based on the sociological monographic method developed by him. The result of this huge interdisciplinary enterprise was published in numerous monographs and the method is utilized until the present. Once in Bucharest, Mosely accompanied Henri H. Stahl, one of Gusti's most prominent collaborators, to do field work in Transylvanian villages. He then embarked on independent research in some several dozens of Transylvanian villages where he recorded "the organization, functioning, structures of authority, the balance of rewards and punishments, within the neighboring system". (Mosely 1954, pp. 34–35). None of this material was published, with the exception of a brief article on the Gusti school (Mosely 1936b), although his archives contain an enormous amount of notes and photographs. The following year he made trips to Bulgaria where he applied the same method, was impressed by the statistical tradition, and published an article in Romanian on Bulgarian agrarian research (Mosely 1936a). In 1936, his interest shifted to the communal (or undivided) family in Yugoslavia, and he undertook extensive field research in Serbia, Bosnia, and Macedonia, including among pastoral Albanians. As Margaret Mead lamented, "that field work, much of which has never been published, is some of the most beautiful work that has ever been done, so perfect, so complete. About every ten years he used to show me those notes and say he was going to work on them again soon if only he could get some particular project settled or some twenty other things completed" (Mead 1972). In fact, Mosely published only three excellent articles based on this material, but the notes and photographs kept in his archive at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign speak not simply of a careful scholar, but of a rare perfectionist (Mosely 1940, 1943, 1953). These three articles were reprinted in an important volume on the communal family of the Balkans, dedicated posthumously to Mosely by his students, friends, and admirers (Byrnes 1976).³

Mosely is rightly celebrated for his groundbreaking approach to the zadruga as a social institution and the de-mythologizing of what was mostly the object of nationalist romanticizing. He argued that one should "give no weight to ethnic and nationality factors in their modern context, and relatively minor weight to religious differences, but ... devote primary attention to regional economic and social factors in attempting to account for differences in the social and psychological structure and the viability of the zadruga" (Mosely 1953, p. 68), a warning that was largely forgotten in later typological generalizations, especially at the time of the Yugoslav wars. He also insisted that in the Balkans "both the joint-family and the small-family exist in the same social atmosphere, in this case, an atmosphere favorable to the persistence of the joint-family" (Mosely 1940, p. 23).

These insights produced further groundbreaking research, more specifically Hammel's approach to the *zadruga* not as an institution but as a process (Hammel 1972).⁴

To this day, Mosely's explanation of the *zadruga* as "a household composed of two or more biological or small families, closely related by blood or adoption, owning its means of livelihood jointly and regulating the control of its property, labor, and livelihood communally" (Mosely 1943, p. 31) is widely cited as the best definition. But, as Petko Hristov in his article in this issue shows, the Bulgarian ethnographer Dimitar Marinov had proposed an almost identical definition half a century earlier (Hristov 2022, pp. 2–3). The point to be made here is that the scholarly research on family forms and specifically on the complex family forms in the Balkans had a long history even before the fruitful apprenticeship of Mosely at the Gusti institute. Everywhere in the Balkans, the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, during the time of independent nation-state institution building, was dominated by the agrarian question and the need for agrarian reforms, and many of the early researchers were, among others, lawyers, studying customary law, land regimes, and creating new agrarian legislation, like the Bulgarians Petar Odzhakov and Stefan Bobchev or the Croatian-born Valtazar (Baltazar) Bogišić, who became justice minister in Montenegro. It was during this period, aptly defined as the Golden Age of the Peasantry (Toshkov 2019), that powerful agrarian movement were formed in Eastern Europe: Stamboliiski's BANU in Bulgaria, the only one that came to power, the Croatian Peasant Party of the brothers Radić, the National Peasant Party in Romania, to name only the Balkans ones. Again, the political and social background were important levers for the direction of scholarship. Equally, during the interwar period, local scholars produced valuable work, some of whom were close correspondents of Mosely, like the Croats Milovan Gavazzi, Milenko Filipović and Vera Ehrlich. This is not to belittle Mosely's fine and pioneering work, but simply to qualify it and put it in a Balkan, not only American or Western context.

It was only natural that scholars would be interested in the forms of the traditional family in societies where the agrarian economy was the predominant factor and at the same time explore how the transition to modernization affected them. What is surprising is that the attention to the communal forms of the family structure continued to be a focus of research even in the second half of the twentieth century when these forms, with the drastic urbanization and industrialization after the Second World War, by the 1990s became virtually extinct. One explanation can be, of course, the practices of western anthropology to focus on the study of traditional peasant societies, as well as academic inertia, to follow and further explore and perfect the trodden path. Perhaps a more tangible explanation has to do with the political context. During the Cold War period it was safer (and more easily permitted) for foreign scholars to study village life in the Eastern bloc, but it had to do also with the attraction of "exotic" topics, attested by the western anthropology of Greece, where there were no political restrictions. By the 1990s, the excessive attention on the communal family and household forms in the Balkans could be compared by analogy to a hypothetical case, when foreign ethnographers would be studying the American family based on the family forms and way of life of the Amish, Shakers, Mormons and other groups of communal living to the exclusion of the statistically predominant ordinary and non-exotic patters.

But the 1990s had another explanation, of course. The political context was the Yugoslav wars of succession and the attempt to make sense of its causes, especially the accompanying violence. The family in many works became a causal explanation for political behavior: "Kinship structures and family contexts in the Balkans are central subjects not only for anthropological historians but also for an interested public that wishes to understand the sometimes mysterious Balkan world. It is sometimes necessary to bring the underlying concepts of societies onto the stage in order to have the opportunity to reconsider ongoing troublesome events" (Kaser 1996, p. 376).⁵ This approach was inspired by the cultural turn, linking family structure with particular emotional regimes, most prominently in the research of the English nuclear family and the works of Peter Laslett

and Alan MacFarlane, and continued by Emmanuel Todd who sought an explanation of ideology through family structures and social systems (Laslett 1977, 1983; MacFarlane 1978, 1986; Todd 1985, 1987).⁶ The easy generalizations in some works produced lively debates and today have receded while careful work on the extended family and marriage patterns continues to be published in the twenty-first century (Čapo-Žmegač 1996; Todorova 1998, 2001, 2006; Gavalas 2008; Doja 2010; Gruber 2012; Kaser 1994; Kaser 2012; Landais 2012; Hristov 2014, 2020).⁷ The previous dominant urge to giving definitive answers to questions about the historical origins of the multiple family households and their geographic and statistical distribution, the position of the Balkans vis-a-vis the Hajnal line (Hajnal 1965), or the fourfold typology of the Cambridge group (Wall et al. 1983) gave way to a widespread agreement that diversity and variety were the main characteristics of the region and specifically what was considered the “typical” Balkan complex family is a phase of the developmental course of the family group.

New themes came to the fore, dictated by the present-day situation: migration and its effects on family structure, labor migration—interregional, to Western Europe and overseas (USA, Canada, Australia), the effect of neoliberal reforms on gender issues, the demographic consequences of low fertility rates and the aging population, a re-evaluation of the socialist period, comparative studies beyond the region, in a word, a problematic which to a great extent was universal and demystified the Balkans (Čapo-Žmegač 2007; Creed 1998; Brunnbauer 2007, 2016; Ghodsee 2005, 2019; Verdery 2003; Kligman and Verdery 2011; Grandits and Heady 2004).

The present issue of Genealogy is not a balance sheet and avoids synthetic conclusions about the state-of-the-art. Rather, it aims at showing the main trends in family research *within* the region and by *local* scholars.⁸ Ironically, the only paper dealing centrally with the extended family, the *zadruga*, is Hristov’s, but it radically turns the tables. Instead of dealing with statistics, the origins, or even the question of the existence of the *zadruga*, the author offers a detailed analysis of “how the model of family organization turned from academic fiction into a pattern for the building of new social relations” (Hristov 2022, p. 2). He traces how in the *longue durée* of the existence of the Bulgarian state, this form of the family organization served different purposes. The late nineteenth-century legislation included some of the organizational principles of this association; the cooperative movement in the interwar period was inspired by it; finally, during the period of state socialism, some traditional stereotypes of common work were deployed in favor of the new socialist ideology in the agricultural sphere. While showing the legitimizing role of the notion of the *zadruga*, his analysis uncovers the ironic paradox that the new socialist cooperatives led to the inevitable demise of the former cooperatives and to radical changes in family relations.

Jasna Čapo’s (2022) paper is not simply a summation of her decades-long studies into Croatian emigration but a methodological effort to link migration studies to classical anthropological research. Moving away from the usual focus on ethnicity in studying the diaspora, she explores emigrant narratives to demonstrate the crucial role of the family and kinship networks in effectuating the local incorporation of migrants. At the same time, maintaining contact with their places of origin and thus being involved in a transnational social field, diasporic families were re-traditionalized and reproduced the family as a community of homeland culture. Čapo introduces a useful distinction as a key to understanding the ethnonational identification of Croatian emigrants, between a “little tradition” based on family, place of origins, religion, and traditional cultural values which is apolitical and only occasionally becomes politicized, and the “great tradition” of the political programs of the nation state.

Following the deep economic crisis after 1989, coupled with the opening of borders, Bulgaria experienced a huge wave of permanent emigration and temporary migration to neighboring Greece, Western Europe, and overseas (USA and Canada). Nacho Dimitrov’s study deals with a specific case of return labor migration of Karakachans, a small Greek-speaking minority. While the effects on family relations are not surprising, their case is

interesting because of the special treatment received by Greece, being considered part of their ethnic diaspora. At first, accommodated preferentially, their subsequent experience displays all the typical contradictions of a parallel life: “migrants make a very strict distinction between their life and work worlds and experience their participation in the host society only at the level of the work world, which can be expressed through the formula ‘we live here, we work there’ (Dimitrov 2022, p. 16).

Patriarchy and masculinity, especially the persistence of traditional forms within modern societies, was one of the main research pillars of studying the Balkans, as well as often used as an explanation for political behavior. With the advent of feminist theory, in particular, the explanatory framework became more nuanced. Based on her extensive ethnological experience, Fotini Tsibiridou traces long-term archaic patterns and narratives from the Western Balkans and Greece to the Caucasus, such as women’s exogamy, patrilineality, dispossession from material goods, male honor, and other customary practices. She shows how they are being modified, adapted, and re-purposed under different socio-political regimes to perpetuate the domination and control over females. Using the insights and vocabulary of postcoloniality and decolonial black feminist critique, she argues for an understanding of “patriarchy as a palimpsest of overlapping dominations for the first and everlasting colonized female bodies,” but also “as a matrix of dispositions for dominant and dominated bodies too, feeding it with habitus and symbolic representations, specific social discriminations, gendered subjectivities, and citizenship (Tsibiridou 2022, p. 15).

Perpetual as the palimpsest of patriarchy is, modernization slowly chips away at its base, although very gradually, contradictorily, and far from radically. Turning from the birds-eye synthesis of Tsibiridou to a microhistorical close-up of women physicians’ careers in Athens in the first half of the twentieth century, brings us to the urban middle-class elites. Eugenia Bournova and Myrto Dimitropoulou emphasize the correlation between university education and the formation of the feminist movement in Greece. The first female student entered the university of Athens in 1890, at a time when 80% of women were illiterate. By the end of the century, women comprised 0.1% of the student body, to rise to 28% in 1955, with an overall female illiteracy rate of 39% in 1951.⁹ The preference for sciences, especially medicine “did not distance them from the traits traditionally attributed to them, i.e., their maternal role and care for family members” (Bournova and Dimitropoulou 2023, p. 4). Given the overall conservative milieu and resistance to female education, it was exclusively family support that allowed the progress of a few elite women, but they did become role models.

Sanja Zlatanović’s also shows the Janus-faced effects of modernization based on her work among the rural Serbian community of south-east Kosovo which had retained traditional patriarchal patterns, unlike the rest of Yugoslavia. After the armed conflicts and the establishment of the UN administration in 1999, considerable numbers were displaced as a result of forced migration to Serbia but found it difficult to adapt. For the remaining, likewise, “old patterns were exposed to changes, and this process was accompanied by conflicts in many domains. The old value system was shaken up, and the new one was difficult to establish” (Zlatanović 2022, p. 16). An interesting observation was that these changes were mostly fomented by the presence of international organizations which had a huge impact on the Albanian community and via them were channeled to their Serbian neighbors, receiving a receptive audience among women, but meeting resistance among men.

Everywhere in the so-called developed world fertility rates dropped under the reproduction coefficient of 2.1 from the 1970s on (US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, all of Eastern Europe with the exception of Poland where the drop occurred only after 1989; Japan’s and Russia’s drop was already in the 1960s, but not in the whole of the USSR).¹⁰ This, with the falling mortality rates resulted in an aging population everywhere in Europe (with small pockets like Albania where it dropped only after the turn of this century). In the post-socialist period in Eastern Europe, it was exacerbated by the emigration of younger

people of working age. Two contributions to our issue are dealing with this problem, one on Bulgaria in the late socialist period, and one on Croatia around the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ilija Iliev's imaginative reading of letters of complaint sent by citizens, demonstrates the need for labor beyond retirement in an aging population and its impact on gender relations. He specifically stresses the adverse effects of the transmission of property in advance, while the parents are still alive. This often led to the abandonment of elders relying on family support from their children who, however, did not feel constrained by traditional moral obligations. Another paradoxical result was the contradiction between policies aimed at the younger generation, stressing equality and interchangeability between men and women in employment and family, and the message directed to the elderly, where males were hired for hard jobs (but at diminished pay), and retired women were taking care of grandchildren and helped with domestic work, effectively encouraging retirees to occupy the same niches as their contemporary labor migrants in Western Europe. All of this can serve as a cautionary tale for many European societies which continue to rely partly on family help for pensioners: "Maybe each affluent society needed some easily accessible sources of low-paid labor, and in the Bulgarian case, these were the elderly" (Iliev 2022, p. 5).

Based on qualitative, cultural anthropological research, Rubić and Vukušić turn their attention away from macro discourses on age as a social problem to a microanalysis of the everyday lives of the elderly in both cities and rural areas. They look at different projects for the elderly aimed at improving their position in society and quality of life, from political parties of pensioners, city unions and pensioners' associations, religious charities, foundations, and educational and cultural institutions, to cultural and artistic groups. An important conclusion is that "it is not the case that when there is less state, there is more family, or vice versa. It is more that family is always present, no matter if it is the "golden age" or a declining period of formal social security systems and a welfare state" (Rubić and Vukušić 2022, p. 3). Especially during the pandemic, it became clear that isolation led to the violation of dignity and an interesting finding was that elders mostly cared about communication and sociability, rather than helping in domestic chores. Therefore, it was the family, as well as "hybrid" and extra-institutional systems that proved to be key ameliorators to the situation.

As already pointed out, the new themes that occupy scholars dealing with various aspects of family history result in the de-exoticization, de-mystification, and normalization of the Balkans, without forsaking the simultaneous effort to show and analyze regional specificities. To recast Tolstoy: "All unhappy families are alike; each happy family is happy in its own way".

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ The articles in *The History of the Family*, vol. 1, N. 4, 1996, included Michael Mitterauer, "Family contexts: the Balkans in European comparison" (pp. 387–406), E.A. Hammel & H.-P. Kohler, "Kinship-based sharing in the agrarian economy of frontier Slavonia, 1698: Evidence from an early census," (pp. 407–23), Joel M. Halpern, Karl Kaser & Richard A. Wagner, "Patriarchy in the Balkans: Temporal and cross-cultural approaches," (pp. 425–42), Maria Todorova "Situating the family of Ottoman Bulgaria within the European pattern," (pp. 443–59), Nenad Vekarić, "The Influence of demographic trends on number of undivided family household in Southern Croatia" (pp. 461–76), Hannes Grandits & Siegfried Gruber, "The dissolution of large complex household in the Balkans: Was the ultimate reason structural or cultural?" (pp. 477–96). They were penned mostly by American and Austrian scholars, with the exception of the Croat Vekarić and the only female in the group, the Bulgarian Todorova (but as a professor in the American academia).

² The Balkan Family History Project was founded in 1993 at the University of Graz. It houses the extensive archive of Joel Halpern fostering further work on Yugoslavia. In addition, it is the center of research on Albania, based on the extensive demographic documentation in the Austrian archives. In 2012, an important volume was published, on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the project. It gathered and reprinted twenty-eight contributions written between 1994 and 2010, and published in various journals or book chapters, thus giving a summary record of the existing research of the group (Kaser 2012).

- 3 This volume was the result of a conference in 1972 at Indiana University in 1972 dedicated to Mosely. Besides four articles of Mosely, the aforementioned three on the Balkans and one on the Russian family, it included an introduction by Margaret Mead, a bibliographical essay on the scholarship of Mosely, a biographical essay by Leonard Shapiro, and one by Stavro Skendi, dealing specifically with Mosely's ideas about the zadruga. The other ten articles comprised three personal reminiscences of growing up in zadrugas by Wayne Vucinich, Jozo Tomasevich and Ante Kadić, and analyses of the communal family in Macedonia by Davis Rheubottom, two on the Albanian extended family by Kosovo by C.J. Grossmith and Vera Erlich, the zadruga in Yugoslavia by Olivera Burić, the Romanian communal village by Daniel Chiriot, on Serbia by E.A.Hammel, and a generalization on the zadruga by Emile Sicard arguing that looking at the zadruga in a global comparative context, it looks like a typical stage in the evolution of property and family relations in a traditional rural context.
- 4 Other important contributions to be mentioned here is the earlier work from the 1960s of (Halpern 1958, 1967), (Halpern and Kerewski-Halpern 1972; Hammel 1968), Traian (Stoianovich 1976).
- 5 The qualifier "mysterious" was an innocuous euphemism for arguing that the Balkans were alien, strange, completely different, and distinct from the European mainstream.
- 6 This was not the first time such a link had been made. Emile Sicard posited already in 1943 that the zadruga is a typical Serbian and, more broadly, South-Slavic family organization which tends to reproduce itself and not to disintegrate into simple family forms (Sicard 1943). He then generalized it as a precursor of socialist agrarian cooperatives (Sicard 1953). Interestingly, however, in the 1970s by his own admission, he "changed my position several times in the forty-five years I have devoted to research on this and closely related subjects. I confess this with neither pride nor shame, but in the spirit of intellectual honesty" and he concluded that this "domestico-economic group be considered a phase in the general evolution of every global society" (Byrnes 1976, p. 252).
- 7 The 2020 issue of *Revue des études slaves* XCI, 3, under the editorship of Marko Božić and Philippe Gelez, in which Hristov 2020 was published, was dedicated to "Une collectivité idéale. L'héritage politique de la zadruga dans les Balkans," and included also contributions by Jasna Vlajić-Popović, Benjamin Landais, Marko Božić, Philippe Gelez, Dubravka Stojanović, and and Stjepan Matković.
- 8 In some ways this was an unintended consequence, as several non-Balkan authors who had been invited to participate declined for various reasons. Equally, while we made the attempt to cover the whole region, some authors who had initially accepted, could not deliver in the end. The eight contributions are written by ten scholars (three from Bulgaria, three from Croatia, three from Greece, one from Serbia) and for the first time demonstrate a reverse gender balance (seven women and three men).
- 9 The figures are from Bournova and Dimitropoulou 2023, as well as from World Illiteracy at Mid-Century. A Statistical Study. Paris: UNESCO, 1975, p. 90. (<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000f02930>, accessed on 14 February 2023).
- 10 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_the_United_States;Demographics_of_the_United_Kingdom;Demographics_of_France;Demographics_of_the_Italy;Demographics_of_Germany;Demographics_of_Poland;Demographics_of_Hungary;Demographics_of_Croatia;Demographics_of_Bulgaria;Demographics_of_Japan (accessed on 14 February 2023). By contrast, Asian fertility rates are among the highest, with the exception of South Korea, where it has dropped from the late 1980s on; the Indian fertility rate dropped for the first time in 2020; the highest being Afghanistan where it dropped from 7.53 to 4.64 from 2000 to 2021. China's drop is the result of a conscious and radical political population control initiated in the 1970s. Africa is at 4.31 in 2021. Latin America and the Caribbean decreased beyond 2.1 only in the last decades.

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