

## **ОТКРЫТИЯ НОВЫХ КИТАЙСКИХ АРХЕОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ НАХОДОК**

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### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

В последние десятилетия в Нинся, Синьцзяне, Ганьсу, Шаньси и Шэньси были раскопаны некоторые могилы, принадлежавшие могущественным согдийским иммигрантам, обосновавшимся в Китае в шестом веке. Термин «сино-согдийское» искусство начал применяться для описания тех погребальных памятников, которые включали в себя как саркофаги, так и погребальные кушетки.

Изображения и сюжеты сино-согдийского искусства отражают традиции Центральной Азии в погребении, основанные на «сианьской» религии, как описано в китайских письменных источниках. Один саркофаг, который был незаконно раскопан где-то в Китае, был подарен Национальному музею Китая в Пекине японским коллекционером в 2012 году. Этот саркофаг в форме дома является типичным для китайского погребального искусства шестого века, украшенного необычными элементами, которые можно отнести к согдийцам, живущим в Китае. На антикварном рынке появились четыре панно и постамент, которые были частью погребального дивана Ан Бей шестого века, и сразу привлекли внимание ученых. В этом случае личность владельца погребального памятника в качестве согдийского подтверждается эпитафией, так как Ан определенно является согдийским именем, которое указывает на Бухару как на его первоначальную родину.

Ключевые слова: саркофаг, погребальная кушетка, сино-согдийское погребальное искусство, согдиана.

### **TWO RECENTLY UNEXCAVATED SINO-SOGDIAN MONUMENTS FOUND IN CHINA: THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CHINA SARCOPHAGUS AND AN BEI FUNERARY COUCH**

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### **ANNOTATION**

Some tombs that belonged to powerful Sogdian immigrants who settled down in sixth century China have been excavated over the last decades in Ningxia, Xinjiang, Gansu, Shanxi and Shaanxi. The term “Sino-Sogdian” art started to be adopted to describe those funerary monuments that included both sarcophagi and funerary couches. The images and subjects of Sino-Sogdian art reflect Central Asian funerary habits rooted in “Xian” religion as described in Chinese written sources. One sarcophagus that was illegally excavated somewhere in China has been donated to the National Museum



of China in Beijing by a Japanese collector in 2012. This house shaped sarcophagus is typical of sixth century Chinese funerary art embellished with unusual elements to be associated to Sogdians living in China. Four panels and a pedestal that were part of the sixth century An Bei funerary couch have appeared on the antiquary market and immediately called the attention of scholars. In this case, the identity of the owner of the funerary monument as a Sogdian is confirmed by the epitaph since An is definitely a Sogdian name that points at Bukhara as his original motherland.

**Key words:** sarcophagus, funerary couch, Sino-Sogdian funerary art, Sogdiana.

Among the foreigner of Iranian origins who migrated and settled in China during the post-Han period, Sogdians definitely constituted the most numerous and influential group. Important information about Sogdian immigrants have been preserved in Chinese written sources. As a matter of fact, Sogdian communities in China had to follow local rules but responded directly to a Sogdian chief who is mentioned sometimes in Chinese sources as *sabao*. The original meaning of this word is probably “caravan leader” and it clearly explains the nature of Sogdian colonies in China which were mainly formed by traders (Sims-Williams, 1996; De La Vaissière, 2005).

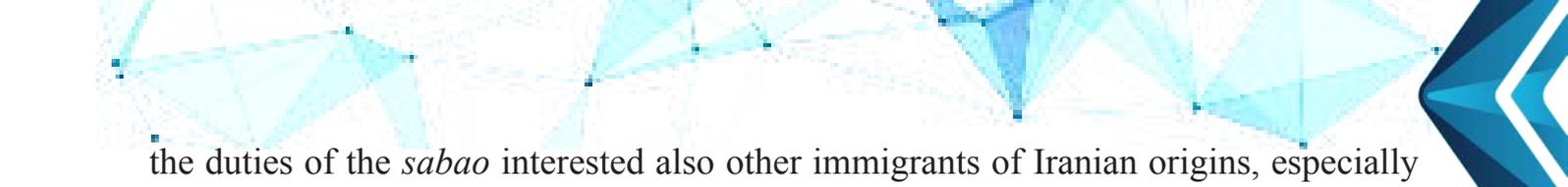
In the beginning of this century, Chinese archaeologists were able to discover some tombs that belonged to powerful Sogdians in different parts of China but especially around Xi’an (Wertmann, 2015). The discovery of a “cemetery of foreigners” in the area of Xi’an represents one of the most important achievement of contemporary Chinese archaeology. Those monuments include both sarcophagi and funerary couches and experts usually point at them as objects of “Sino-Sogdian” art (Lerner, 2005). The study of Sino-Sogdian funerary art allowed to include in this group also those monuments that were not excavated and are at present part of private or museum collections in different parts of the world.

In this paper I would like to illustrate parts of a funerary couch and one entire sarcophagus that have been probably found in central China and should be included in the group of Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments.

### **The Sogdians in China**

The number of Sogdians in the Heavenly Empire increased remarkably after the Han period. Sogdians took Chinese surnames known in the dynastic records as “the nine *Hu* families” and started to fill important positions in the army and civil administration (fig. 1). According to those written sources, Sogdians from Samarkand adopted in China the surname *Kang*, those from Bukhara *An*, Kish was rendered as *Shi*, Maymurgh corresponded to *Mi*, Kushanya to *He*, Ustrushana to *Cao*, Tashkent (or Chach) to *Shi* and Paykand to *Bi* (de la Vaissière, 2005: 120; Yoshida, 2003). Despite the Chinese chronicles speak of nine *Hu* families, it does not seem that this number corresponded exactly to nine Sogdian city-states. It was probably just a Chinese way to call them without any precise correspondence.

Sogdian *sabao* held public offices to control the immigrants and their affairs in China but also other matters such as religion. It should not be ruled out the possibility that



the duties of the *sabao* interested also other immigrants of Iranian origins, especially Bactrians, Chorasmians and Persian who after the destruction of the Sasanian Empire by the Arabs were exiled at the Tang court. The son of the last Sasanian sovereign Yazdegard III (632-651) received some military support by the Chinese Emperor Tang Gaozong (650-683) in order to try to reconquer Persia but he failed and ended his days as a military officer in Chang'an (Compareti, 2009a; Agostini, Stark, 2016).

Not only during the Tang dynasty but also in the period of Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589) and the Sui (581-618), the importance of Sogdian immigrants at court grew considerably as it is reported in Chinese sources. Most of Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments that have been excavated in China are dated to this period and, according to their epitaph in Chinese and (less frequently) in Sogdian language, they belonged to *sabao* or their family members. The funerary monuments of those powerful Sogdians who died in China during the sixth century were probably executed by local Chinese artists. However, the scenes and subjects depicted on these monuments are definitely rooted in the religion and culture of Sogdiana. The religion of the Sogdians still represents a matter of debate among scholars but it is clear that it was not exactly like the creed of other Iranian peoples. It is worth observing that Chinese sources called the religion of the Sogdians *Xian* and, in doing so, they distinguished it from Persian religion usually called Zoroastrianism or Mazdeism (Riboud, 2005). Many deities depicted in Sogdian paintings at Penjikent confirmed what is recorded in Chinese sources.

Biographies of important Sogdians can be found sometimes in Chinese chronicles. According to the *Suishu* "History of the Sui", the control of some weaving centers of Sichuan, specializing in the production of "Persian textiles", was given by imperial decree in 605 to a man of Sogdian origins whose name was He Chou. He was also an expert in the production of glazed tiles for the surface architectural decoration. It is worth observing that despite his Sogdian background, the Sui Emperor asked him to produce Persian textiles (Compareti, 2011a). This point could help to understand the relationships between China and the Sogdian immigrants who, most likely, transmitted false information to the Chinese and presented their own products as Persian ones definitely in order to earn more money. In Chinese art from the Sui and Tang period there is very scanty traces of the use of textiles decorated with motifs imported from Persia or, more probably, Central Asia. The very well-known pattern usually called "pearl roundels" that was very popular in the Byzantine Empire, Central Asia, Tibet, Mongolia and even in Korea and Japan does not appear on the garments of high rank Chinese officials. It is very probable that the Chinese court used this kind of precious textiles to be presented as diplomatic gifts to those kingdoms that exchanged embassies with Chang'an (Compareti, 2006).

Pearl roundel patterns were not that common in pre-Islamic Persian arts. Pearl roundels containing wild boar heads and other subjects embellished important buildings in western Iran and at the capital Ctesiphon, not far from Baghdad. However, it is very difficult to establish a precise chronology for these buildings which should be considered late Sasanian or proto-Islamic. In all probability, pearl roundels were not Sasanian but Central Asian patterns. Sogdian weavers possibly created such pattern and started



to export textiles embellished with pearl roundels everywhere in the Eurasian continent (Compareti, 2004). Central Asian weaving techniques were highly appreciated and in great demand at the Byzantine and Chinese courts. The Sogdian taste influenced every Chinese artistic field in this period. Painters from Central Asia are especially celebrated in the sources but foreign elements are traceable also in Chinese metalwork of the Tang period.

The positions of the Sogdians at the Chinese court was aggravated by the rebellion of An Lushan (755-756), a general of Sogdian origin (his name refers to the word *rokhs* “light”, the same as Alexander’s wife, Roxane) who almost broke up the Tang Empire. But the Chinese, already threatened by the Tibetans, asked the Uighur Turks (744-840) for help. The Sogdians were able to maintain their privileges in China because of the protection granted by the Uighurs, and increase their power at the latter’s court. The Sogdians and the Persians, then, enjoyed the funds of the Tang court, at least until the arrival of Minister Li Mi (722-789) who refused them such privileges in 787. This was one of the measures adopted by the Chinese minister in order to oppose the power of Iranians at the court, and remove their control over the production of goods competing with the Chinese ones (Compareti, 2002).

During the eighth-ninth centuries, the activity of Sogdians in China inevitably decreased. They resisted along the caravan and maritime trade routes for some time but eventually disappeared completely with the arrival of the Mongols in the thirteenth century. The Uighurs, who nowadays use to write an adaptation of the Arabic alphabet, in the beginning adopted the Sogdian script derived from the Syriac alphabet but written in vertical lines because of the influence of Chinese habits. The Uighurs handed down to the Mongols such an alphabet which is still used in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Chinese Province. Later, even the Manchu founders of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) adopted the same alphabet with some modifications (Livshits, 2015: 269).

Traces of the activity of the Sogdians can be observed among the recent archaeological discoveries in Korea and Japan, especially regarding sumptuary arts (Kim, 2017). In the imperial repository of the Shoso-in at Nara (Japan), large amounts of precious objects (silks, metalwork, glass and musical instruments) were discovered which at first were considered the result of the encounter between Persian and Chinese art. Most probably they were produced in Chinese workshops managed by Sogdians, or where the influence of Sogdian art was massive (Compareti, 2006).

### **Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments**

In their motherland the Sogdians adopted different funerary habits: they usually exposed the dead to be eaten by wild animals and later recollected just the bones to be preserved in special terracotta ossuaries (*astodan*). Sometimes, these ossuaries were decorated with images of local deities and with funerary scenes as well (fig. 2).

A group of Sogdian ossuaries discovered in the region of Shahrisabz (Kish in ancient time, *Shi* in Chinese sources) presents a very complicated scene divided in two parts (Berdimuradov, Bogomolov, Daeppen, Khushvaktov, 2008). In the upper level, a central deity is holding a scale with the soul of the dead symbolically represented as



a small naked human figure (fig. 3). In Zoroastrian traditions, the god Rashnu is supposed to judge symbolically the dead with a scale and, in all probability, it is his image on those Shahrīsabz Sogdian ossuaries. Scenes representing the soul of the dead on a scale under the supervision of a deity of the underworld can be observed quite often in more ancient Egyptian art as well: this practice is commonly called *psychostasy*. Together with Rashnu, Mithra and Sraoša are mentioned in Zoroastrian texts waiting for the soul of the dead to be judged. However, even if in Zoroastrian literature Mithra is actually associated to the horse as it can be observed in the Shahrīsabz ossuaries, in those same texts Sraoša is connected to the rooster. The deity in the upper left corner of Shahrīsabz ossuaries is sitting on a throne supported by rams. It is not possible to identify clearly that deity because Sogdian art still presents many enigmatic points. In the lower level of Shahrīsabz ossuaries, a kneeling person and a Zoroastrian priest wearing a special mask (*padam*) to avoid to pollute the holy fire with his breath are represented while attending some kind of ritual. It is not clear who should be the kneeling person but it is not to be ruled out that she could be the wife of the dead.

The Sogdians who died in China adopted local habits most likely to appear as much Chinese as possible. They just kept some aspects of their religion (*Xian*) in the decorations along the panels composing those sarcophagi and funerary couches which, as already observed above, have started to be known by specialists as Sino-Sogdian monuments (Lerner, 2005).

Among the most interesting Sino-Sogdian monuments in China, the Shi Jun sarcophagus stands apart. The sarcophagus is now kept in the Xi'an Museum and it is not only important for its carved decorations but also for its epitaph in Chinese and Sogdian (fig. 4). In some panels that compose the sarcophagus, different scenes and Sogdian deities can be observed. Scholars individuated the passage of the Chinvat Bridge that is mentioned in Zoroastrian literature as a necessary passage for the soul of the dead to enter into the underworld (Grenet, Riboud, Yang, 2004). If the dead had a good behavior in life, the bridge will then appear large and comfortable leading the soul to paradise. On the contrary, if the dead behaved badly, the bridge becomes as sharp as a blade to let the soul to finish in hell where monsters will torment and devour it.

In the Shi Jun sarcophagus, the Chinvat Bridge can be identified on one lateral panel. A caravan is crossing the bridge while two priests wearing a mask (*padam*) and holding special vegetal sticks used to celebrate Zoroastrian rituals (*barsom*) stand on the right together with a couple of dogs. Below, among the waves, animals with monstrous heads can be observed as described in Zoroastrian literature. In the upper part there is a deity supervising the passage of the soul. He is represented as the Indian god Shiva holding a trident and sitting on his bull Nandi repeated three times. According to rare Sogdian texts found at Dunhuang, that deity could be identified as Weshparkar, the Sogdian god of wind. He can certainly be recognized also in one eighth century Sogdian painting from Penjikent because of an inscription on his leg to be read Weshparkar. His iconography is definitely the one of Indian Shiva (fig. 5). For some reason not completely clarified, the Sogdians have started to adopt the iconography of Indian divinities for their own local ones at least since the sixth century (Compareti, 2009b;



Grenet, 2010).

Other sixth century Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments scientifically excavated include: Tianshui, Yu Hong, An Jia, Kang Ye and An Bei. The studies conducted on these monuments allowed to include in the same group also other funerary monuments that were not excavated but could be considered as belonging to the Sino-Sogdian group because of the style of their decorations. They also share the same chronology that could allow to imagine the second half of the sixth century as the most probable period of execution. This other group includes more funerary couches and sarcophagi: Vahid Kooros, Anyang, Miho Museum, Yidu, Victoria and Albert Museum and two in the Shelby White and Leon Levy Collection in New York (fig. 6).

### **The National Museum of China sarcophagus**

One last sarcophagus to be included in the Sino-Sogdian monuments group has recently entered in the collection of the National Museum of China in Beijing (Ge, 2016; Compareti, Li, 2018 forthcoming). It was illegally excavated somewhere in northern China and sold in the antiquary market from where it reached Japan. Thanks to the interest of Mr. Horiuchi Noryoshi, it was donated to the National Museum of China in 2012 and it is at present exposed there (fig. 7). Unfortunately the epitaph is missing but it is pretty clear that the tomb occupant was not a Chinese. Beside the door on the southern side there are two unusual guardians who call to mind a Sogdian warrior dressed in the traditional attire on the left and another person holding a long spear who does not wear any dress on his chest but just a cloak knotted in the front. His curly hair and the detail of the naked chest could call to mind Herakles (fig. 8). All the male characters reproduced on the external panels of the sarcophagus have curly hair, a long nose and moustache or beards. They are also represented while dancing according to an attitude typically pointing at Sogdian people in Chinese monuments.

The tomb occupant could be identified among the multitude of attendants as the man with a long beard wearing a typical *sapao* hat who recurs in several scenes. On the southern side just observed above he is represented on the righter side sitting on a couch under an umbrella. In one instance on the western side he is riding a horse while his attendants are holding an umbrella to protect him. Every person in the scene seems to ride or walk in the direction of the leader of the parade who is holding an object that could be an incense burner or a portable altar. The main character under the umbrella is wearing an elaborated crown surmounted by a crescent containing a circular object, probably a solar symbol (fig. 9). Also this kind of crown looks like Sogdian crowns to be observed sometimes in paintings at Penjikent (Naymark, 1992: pl. LXXXIII, 39).

Every panel of the National Museum sarcophagus respond to a precise symmetrical order. On the other shorter side (eastern) a parade of women and attendants accompanies the wife of the owner of the tomb who cannot be seen because she is inside the chariot drawn by an ox (fig. 10). Two windows in the upper part of the chariot could represent a very convincing evidence to imagine her presence and some necessity for fresh air. Something similar could be observed in the funerary couch of the Vahid Kooros collection where behind the curtains and from one open window of the ox



chariot also faces of women can be seen (Riboud, 2004: 26).

On the other long side (northern), the main couple is represented in the center probably celebrating their own wedding while female and male attendants occupy both sides without mixing together (fig. 11). Enigmatic tubular elements can be observed at the beginning of the group of male attendants. At the end of both groups there are two scenes possibly pointing at the funeral of the tomb occupant and his wife. On the right a group of horse without a rider under an umbrella could be considered as the vehicle for the underworld to be used by a male personality, most likely the owner of the sarcophagus. The presence of five horses is pretty uncommon since usually there is normally just the horse of the tomb occupant. So, the other horses could be considered to be his sons' horses or, less probably, other members of his family or even attendants. On the left, another ox-drawn chariot could be an allusion to the travel into the underworld of a relevant woman. In this case there are no open parts of the chariot because, in all probability, the woman is intended to be dead.

As correctly observed by Ge Chengyong, at least two horse riders of the parade following the man holding an altar on the western side have stirrups (Ge, 2016: 75). This details is very important to propose a chronology for that sarcophagus that should be dated in all probability to the second half of the sixth or even early seventh century.

### **The An Bei funerary couch**

Only the epitaph, few *mingqi*, part of the pedestal and just four panels of the An Bei funerary couch have survived the destruction of the site that should have been accidentally excavated in Dengfeng, Henan Province. The four panels have been bought by a private collector who fortunately allowed their publication while the other objects are exhibited at present in the Tang West Market Museum in Xi'an (Li, 2016: 101). According to his epitaph, An Bei was born in a family of high rank military officials and died in Luoyang in 589 (Riboud, 2007: 2; Ge, 2009).

The four panels of An Bei couch are very close in style and subjects to the so-called Miho funerary couch. In fact, elements such as the pearl borders containing vegetal scrolls and the way of representing the trees and camels definitely call to mind the Sino-Sogdian monument in the Miho Museum (Marshak, 2001: 234-244). Two panels present parades in the open. One is definitely a caravan composed by a group of foreigners (probably Sogdians) two camels and a donkey loaded with goods (fig. 12). The other scene is just a parade of foreigners moving on the right. Curiously enough, almost everybody presents a halo behind the head, an elaborated crown and floating ribbons, even the attendant who is holding the umbrella to protect the most important figure to be definitely identified with the owner of the couch (fig. 13).

Two more panels depict banquet scenes with some peculiar differences. In one panel the scene could be considered to be very realistic: it is a festivity taking place in a pavilion in the presence of female and male attendants, musicians and dancers who are pleasing an important person represented alone under the pavilion while drinking from a cup (fig. 14). He is the only one bigger in size than anybody else in the same scene. Finally, a banquet scene taking place under some trees and a big umbrella. Two main



characters bigger in size and half naked with a big belly are drinking respectively from a cup and *rhyton* while attendants around them present food and transport more wine in big jars (fig. 15). Their identity is not clear but it should be observed that people in a similar attitude appear in two panels of the funerary couch in the Vahid Kooros collection (Riboud, 2004: 20, 26). It is neither easy to suggest a possible representation of deities represented with Indian characteristics, something which is not unusual in Sogdian religious art (Grenet, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

Every Sino-Sogdian funerary monument presents pretty clear individual elements that in all probability reflected the personal taste of the tomb occupant. Despite such an evident peculiarity, these monuments respond also to consolidated common patterns rooted in local traditions and possibly developed by foreign communities that had already settled down in China for some time. Scenes such as marriage, processions in the open that sometimes include a hunt and funerals respond quite precisely to models followed more or less in every Sino-Sogdian monument found during controlled excavations or illegally sold on the antiquary market. Such a sequence of scenes can be observed also on the so-called painted vase from Merv that in all probability was in origin an ossuary (Compareti, 2011b). Those scenes should be then considered as belonging in more general terms to the “Zoroastrian” background of the owner of Sino-Sogdian monuments. Other scenes on Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments including caravans or banquets possibly alluding to religious festivities could have been represented as well such as in the case of the An Bei couch. Even though no Sogdian deities can be identified in those two monuments under exam, it seems quite clear that the National Museum sarcophagus and the An Bei couch should be included in the group of Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments.

### **Captions**

Figure 1. Map of the main Sogdian sites. After: Compareti, 2001.

Figure 2. Sogdian ossuary from Istaravshan (seventh century). National Museum of Antiquities of Tajikistan. Photo: M. Compareti.

Figure 3. Ossuary recently found at Shahrissabz (seventh century?). Chubin Madrasa, Shahrissabz. Photo: M. Compareti.

Figure 4. The Shi Jun sarcophagus in the Xi'an Museum (579 CE). Photo: M. Compareti.

Figure 5. Image of Weshparkar from Penjikent, sector XXII/room 1 (early eighth century). The State Hermitage. Photo: M. Compareti.

Figure 6. Scheme of the excavated and unexcavated Sino-Sogdian funerary monuments.

Figure 7. Sino-Sogdian sarcophagus in the National Museum of China (second half of the sixth century-early seventh century). Photo: M. Compareti.

Figure 8. Southern side of the Sino-Sogdian sarcophagus in the National Museum of China. After: Ge, 2016: fig. 3, 8. Photo of rubbings: M. Compareti.

Figure 9. Western side of the Sino-Sogdian sarcophagus in the National Museum of China. After: Ge, 2016: fig. 9.

Figure 10. Eastern side of the Sino-Sogdian sarcophagus in the National Museum of China. After: Ge, 2016: fig. 10.

Figure 11. Northern side of the Sino-Sogdian sarcophagus in the National Museum of China. After: Ge, 2016: fig. 11, 14.

Figure 12. Caravan scene from one panel of An Bei funerary couch. After: Li, 2016: fig. 21.

Figure 13. Parade of men from one panel of An Bei funerary couch. After: Li, 2016: fig. 21.

Figure 14. Ritual (?) festivity from one panel of An Bei funerary couch. After: Li, 2016: fig. 21.

Figure 15. Drinking scene from one panel of An bei funerary couch. After: Li, 2016: fig. 21.

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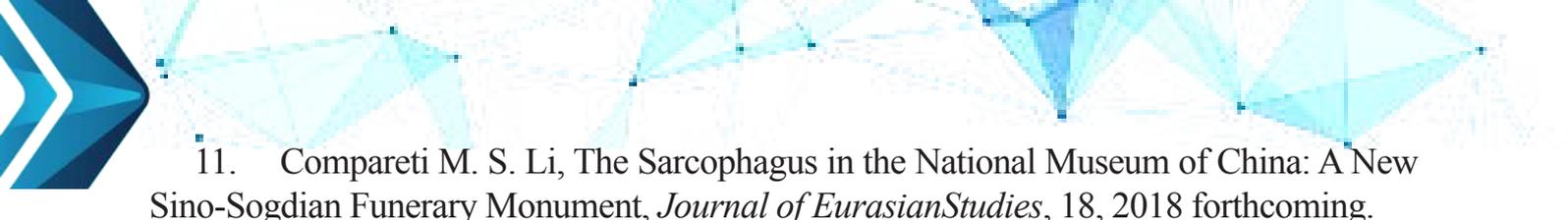
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