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To cite this article: María Victoria Correa Baeriswyl 2021 *IOP Conf. Ser.: Mater. Sci. Eng.* **1203** 022002

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Restorations in Chile in the Mid-Twentieth Century: The National Monuments Council and Some of the First Architectural Heritage Interventions

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Abstract. This paper presents the initial results of an ongoing historical research project that addresses some of the first architectural restoration interventions led by the Chilean State through the National Monuments Council, the institution responsible for management of the country's cultural heritage. The National Monuments Council was created in 1925 by Decree-Law No. 651, the first long-standing legal provision to cover this aspect of cultural heritage. It remained in place for several decades before being superseded in 1970 by the current National Monuments Law (No. 17,288). The State's first steps in regard to architectural restoration were made possible by this legislation, and by the mid-twentieth century, the National Monuments Council was working systematically to register, analyse and take action to restore the country's architectural heritage. In 1949, a Conservation Commission was formed as part of the Council, and this body played a key role in the promotion of restoration projects at the time. The National Monuments Council worked in partnership with the General Directorate of Public Works, and efforts on the part of the two public institutions resulted in the creation of an annual budget for architectural restoration. By the 1950s, numerous buildings and sites considered relevant to the national identity were being restored, and efforts were made to emphasise their cultural significance and value. These early interventions were some of the first of their type to be funded by the State and were fundamental to the local architectural historical context. Work focused primarily on religious and military colonial buildings, including churches, chapels and fortresses located the length of Chile. Archival material from the time, such as National Monuments Council session minutes and institutional bulletins drafted under Decree-Law No. 651, provide a record of these early interventions. Analysis of these sources from a technical and theoretical perspective provides insights into the motivations and selection criteria used to establish an order of priority for the restoration of buildings and sites. This paper presents the main actions taken at a time when architectural restoration was first being promoted by the Chilean State and explores how these provided the foundations upon which future development of the local discipline would occur.

1. Introduction: Legal Provisions for Heritage Conservation in Chile

The legislation concerning heritage conservation in Chile dates back to the second decade of the twentieth century. In 1910, the centenary year of national independence, a bill was presented to the Council of State for the conservation of historic monuments [1]. The bill sought to identify those "artistic" and "historic" goods in need of protection: "*In Chile there are buildings of an artistic nature and a diversity of historic monuments, some of which have been in existence for several centuries. These buildings and monuments are in a severe state of deterioration, for example, the colonial forts built at various points along the frontier, particularly in Corral Bay, and in many other locations*" [1].

The foreword to the 1910 bill reflects the importance ascribed to conservation of local heritage during the period, indicating that: “*There is a need for legislation for the protection of historic buildings and monuments and for the conservation of heritage left by our forebears for the sake of future generations*” [1]. It is notable that for a full hundred years after the independence process was complete, no legislation was put in place to protect the country’s architectural heritage. Some years after the bill was presented, conservation legislation was passed that included provisions based on the original ideas relating to the concept of monuments.

It was not until 1925 that legislation was passed to form an institution explicitly responsible for the safeguarding and protection of monuments: the National Monuments Council that we know today. The institution underwent certain changes over the course of the twentieth century and its underlying legislation was updated in 1970, but its name has remained the same.

In 1925, two legal provisions were made regarding heritage conservation in Chile. The first was Decree No. 3,500, which applied only from June to October 1925 [2]. The decree concerned the creation of a “commission responsible for monitoring and conservation of national historic monuments” while a law was being drafted, specifying that: “*The historic and archaeological buildings and monuments within the national territory are under the protection of the State, and while a law is being drafted on this subject [...] a Governmental Commission is hereby created, which will be responsible for the monitoring, restoration and conservation of these monuments*” [2]. The decree established the structure of this commission, which would involve directors of museums, archives and other public institutions, along with representatives from the fields of local art and history. The commission was led by the Minister for Public Instruction and its initial tasks included the creation of a register of historic and archaeological monuments, detailed information regarding the restoration work required in each case, and the formulation of general measures for the protection of local heritage.

October 1925 saw the passing of Decree-Law No. 651, which established the creation of the National Monuments Council [3]. This legislation remained in place for several decades and played an instrumental role in heritage conservation in Chile. In 1970, it was superseded by the current National Monuments Law (No. 17,288) [4]. Under the 1925 legislation, the National Monuments Council led the first architectural restoration projects at a number of sites and buildings around the country.

Early action on the part of the State regarding the identification, safeguarding and restoration of heritage buildings is of particular interest. The majority of this work took place during the mid-twentieth century and became the basis of subsequent development in architectural conservation and restoration in Chile.

2. The Early Years of the National Monuments Council

The National Monuments Council began its work by focusing on financial and administrative issues, the safeguarding of architectural heritage, the creation of an inventory of national monuments, and the monitoring of these sites. Minutes from the first Council session available in the archives are dated 1935 and titled “*Minutes from the Session of the National Monuments Council Held in the Office of the Minister for Education on Tuesday 18 June 1935*” [5]. This first document declares the National Monuments Council “established” on this date [5]. Although there are no records of previous sessions, these minutes suggest that the Council had been in operation and engaged in the study of regulations and other work for some years [5].

The first indication of the availability of funds for restoration works is provided by session minutes from 26 June 1935, which register a budgetary study for presentation to the Ministry of Education that year. The budget included internal operational expenses and others for “*conservation and repair of objects and places being monitored*” [6]. The document indicates a sum of \$60,000* allocated for the repair and conservation of public buildings [6].

Although during the early decades mention is made of the requirements of particular restoration projects, it is not until 1950 that session minutes begin to reference a planned and systematic restoration programme involving continuous State funding. In minutes from 24 April 1950 [7], a budget allocated by the General Directorate of Public Works specifically for the purposes of architectural restoration marks the commencement of ongoing conservation activities in Chile. The budget was set to an annual figure of \$500,000, which was sufficient to cover a number of restoration and conservation projects. This amount is documented continuously in Council minutes between 1950 and 1954 [7-11], referred to as “Repair Funds” in 1950, 1951, 1952 and 1954, and as “Restoration Funds” in 1953.

The Council minutes mention numerous projects and interventions the length of the country that would be covered by this funding. This was a fundamental period in the recent history of the discipline and included some of the first projects of this type to be promoted by the National Monuments Council and financed by the State. These early projects constitute the country’s first steps in architectural restoration taken with the help of a public institution responsible for safeguarding local heritage.

3. A Conservation Commission in the Mid-Twentieth Century

“It is an extensive programme with positive implications for the nation and for tourism. Culture goes hand in hand with respect for traditions and relics which together bear witness to a country’s history, and it is to be hoped that these elements will become a nucleus of public awareness, positive understanding, and respect for their significance within the events that have so laboriously woven the fabric of our history.”

“Por los Monumentos Nacionales” *Revista En Viaje*, No. 182, pp.50–51, December 1948. Quotation in reference to the work of the National Monuments Council in the mid-twentieth century [12].

A review of National Monuments Council session minutes reveals the projects included in the first architectural restoration budgets of the period. Although occasional initiatives had existed previously, it was not until the 1950s that these became systematic and planned.

In late 1949, a permanent “Conservation Commission” was formed within the Council [13] and was responsible for analysis, identification and restoration of buildings and sites considered to be of value at the time. The Commission comprised the General Director of Public Works; Eugenio Pereira, National Monuments Council Member; and Roberto Montandón, Technical Consultant to the Council at the time.

The creation of the Commission is documented in session minutes from 1 December 1949: *“CONSERVATION COMMISSION: Following an exchange of ideas on the subject, it is agreed that a PERMANENT COMMISSION will be formed comprising the General Director of Public Works or his representative from the Department of Architecture, Mr Eugenio Pereira, and Mr Montandón in the capacity of Reporting Advisor. For each case, this Commission will request input from the Councillors according to their professional and technical speciality, and may request advice from Mr Alfredo Benavides and Mr Secchi, architects specialising in colonial architecture. The conclusions of this Commission will be presented to the Council for their information and examination. The Commission will also be responsible for providing consultation to Council members regarding the optimum execution of their work and for proposed identification of historic and archaeological monuments.”* [13]

The text highlights consultation from experts in colonial architecture, and this is in line with the considerable interest paid during the period to the conservation of numerous buildings from this period of local history.

In the early 1950s, identification, intervention and promotion of heritage were three concepts that were prominent in the work of the National Monuments Council. Of particular relevance during the

period was the work of Roberto Montandón – photographer, cultural heritage researcher [14] and expert in conservation and restoration [15] – who made a valuable contribution to the field in Chile. According to Guarda (1973): “*In 1949, he was offered the position of Technical Consultant for the National Monuments Council as a full-time role. The aim was to streamline the Council’s activities and make use of his knowledge of the country and his experience in a dynamic field that was unknown in Chile – the protection of cultural and historic heritage. In this role, which he performs with true devotion, he launches, with the backing of the Council, three base programmes: the historic architectural heritage inventory, the first restoration works carried out outside the capital, and the publication of the National Monuments Council Notebooks.*” [16]

It was at this point that considerable work began on the creation of publications to document contemporary knowledge regarding local heritage. Four National Monuments Council Notebooks were published between 1950 and 1953: “Notes on the Pukará de Lasana” (1950), “Colonial Churches and Chapels of the Atacama Desert” (1951), “The Pre-Nineteenth-Century Chilean House” (1952) and “The San Francisco Church and Convent” (1953). Today, these are considered valuable works on historic sites and local architecture.

In his foreword to the first Notebook, Eugenio Pereira (1950) mentions a “patriotic cultural cause”: “*The National Monuments Council has taken the decision to begin the publication of materials accumulated by its technical commissions over the course of years of work. [...] We hope that the good intentions of the members of this Council will be warmly received by the public in order that the Council may in return endorse the efforts that, in support of a patriotic cultural cause, lie at the heart of the legislation that governs its activities*” [17].

During the 1950s, evidence of the work of the Conservation Commission began to emerge in the form of a number of restoration projects funded by official budgets allocated by the General Directorate of Public Works. The Directorate was represented within the Commission, and this was doubtless crucial to the alignment of efforts regarding the restoration and conservation of local heritage during the period.

The majority of the early works carried out by the National Monuments Council concerned buildings and sites from the colonial period, primarily Spanish fortifications in the south of the country and churches in the north, which had been part of the evangelisation of the local population by the colonising forces.

In the mid-twentieth century, heritage-related activities became more organised and began to address particular objectives. Sound management and coordination between the National Monuments Council and the General Directorate of Public Works provided the foundations for an ongoing – and nationally pioneering – programme of architectural restoration projects.

4. The First Restorations Promoted by the National Monuments Council

Following the inauguration of the National Monuments Council’s Conservation Commission in 1949, the session minutes from 24 April 1950 include the first budget allocated by the General Directorate of Public Works for the restoration of seven sites and buildings (Figure 1). The budget assigned funding for work on the Forts of Valdivia (\$180,000), the Pukará de Lasana (\$60,000), the Tarapacá Church (\$180,000) and the Matilla Bell Tower (\$30,000) [7]. A further sum of \$50,000 was made available in support of these or any other restoration projects, bringing the total for that year to \$500,000.

These first restoration works covered cleaning, consolidation and repair of the Spanish forts located along the estuary of the Valdivia River; identification of the original layout, clean-up of ruins and consolidation of the Pukará de Lasana; restoration of the Tarapacá Church; and repairs to the Matilla Bell Tower [7]. The works focused on colonial-era buildings, with the exception of the Pukará de Lasana, a pre-Hispanic site.

Work carried out to the fortifications of Valdivia focused on the Corral, Mancera, Niebla and Amargos Forts in southern Chile (Figures 2 and 3). These fortifications were constructed in the seventeenth century [18] as part of defences against naval attack during the Spanish colonial period. The general phases of the work plan included cleaning, exploration and clearance, consolidation, restoration, reposition and reassembly of artillery, and partial reconstruction [19].

Excavations were also carried out to expose the remains of fortifications that had become buried (Figure 4), along with general clean-up and undergrowth clearance, and consolidation, reconstruction and masonry work to sections of wall [20]. Walls were rebuilt to match the maximum height of those found during excavations of buried ruins, up to 1 metre in height [21] (Figure 5). The restoration works enabled visitors to gain a general idea of the layout of these sites without the need for a total reconstruction of the forts.

Work carried out at the Pukará de Lasana, a pre-Hispanic site in northern Chile, were heralded as the first archaeological repairs to be performed in the country [22]. This fortified village was built by the Atacameña culture around the twelfth century [18] as a means of defence. Work on the ruins included clearance, consolidation, reconstruction of walls, and the recovery of the layout of the settlement [20], with the aim of allowing a clear interpretation of the site, which consisted of narrow streets and dwellings built of semi-worked stone. Stones from collapsed buildings were removed and organised, structures were consolidated, and fragments of wall were repaired (Figures 6 and 7). For the most part, reconstruction was only “*to half-height*” [23]. It is important to note that reconstruction work on the fortifications of Valdivia and the Pukará de Lasana was limited to a partial and height-restricted reconstitution of the original layout of the sites in order to provide an overall view of the whole. Complete reconstruction of the original architecture was not included in the restoration of these sites.

In 1951, in reference to the works at the Pukará, Montandón stated: “*We were engaged in repairs that sought to consolidate what was there rather than to achieve a complete and formal restoration*” [22]. As such, an in-situ evaluation was made at each site: “*consolidating as much as possible, preserving the ruined state but attempting at the same time to restore forms and structures*” [22]. Complete restoration was avoided: “*it would be a highly onerous and imprecise task and would go beyond the practices applied internationally in such circumstances*” [23]. More complete reconstruction was only carried out on one particular building at the site, which was rebuilt using original materials and techniques, including beams, interwoven branches, straw and mud, in order to provide an example of the original architecture [23].

The repair work budget of 1950 also covered the Tarapacá Church and the Matilla Bell Tower – religious buildings from the colonial period in northern Chile, built during the eighteenth century [18]. A different approach was taken at these sites.

The survey of the Matilla Bell Tower indicated severe earthquake damage, including the collapse of the dome, the weakening of the tower itself, and numerous cracks in the structure [24]. The proposed works involved structural modifications in the form of contemporary materials, namely reinforced concrete columns, tie beams and slabs, as well as the complete reconstruction of the bell tower’s dome (Figures 8 and 9) [24]. All of these modifications were implemented inside the tower, leaving the outside free of any evidence of the work. As Montandón indicated in 1952: “*The restoration work [...] has not modified the original architectural form in any way*” [24].

The reinforced concrete tie beams were plastered on the outside using chalk-based mortar to match the tower’s façade [24]. On this subject, Montandón asserted in 1951: “*The concrete structure did not affect the architectural line of the bell tower; furthermore, it will be plastered with the original limestone of the region.*” [25] The reconstruction involved in this restoration work was based on a historic photograph: “*The spire has been reconstructed with the help of an old photograph; the cross, which has been kept in the sacristy, will be positioned on top*” [25] (Figure 10).

Finally, the Tarapacá Church had been damaged by an earthquake [26], motivating its inclusion in the 1950 budget, which specified “*repair and restoration*” works to the building [7]. In 1949 there was a desire to prioritise work on “*the most vital repairs to the church in order to preserve its original aspect*”, as indicated by a communication issued that year by the Ministry of Public Works to the National Monuments Council [27]. Architectural and stylistic assessments were made in advance of the Tarapacá Church and Matilla Bell Tower projects, along with a comparative study of the churches of northern Chile that sought to establish guidelines for the restoration [28].

Successive annual budgets gave continuity to the restoration works planned for the first seven sites and provided capacity to begin work on other historic buildings around the country. In 1951, existing restoration work continued, and financing was added for work to the San Pedro de Atacama and Achao Churches [8]. In 1952, the programme was expanded to include the Mocha and Huaviña Chapels and the Chiu-Chiu Church [9]. In 1953, in addition to ongoing works, budget was allocated to the Purén Fort through a piece of legislation that granted funding for the site’s “*conservation and beautification*” [10]. In 1954, budget was once again provided to fund ongoing restoration work [11].

After the budget of 1954, Council session minutes document a request for background information regarding the conservation status of certain buildings and a list of projects completed and management work carried out in advance of a restoration funding request. The sites mentioned in these minutes include the Toconao Bell Tower, the Nacimiento Fort, the house in which Gabriela Mistral was born, and the Ahui Fort.**

The works carried out in the period are summarised in a chart drawn up by Roberto Montandón in 1952 [20]. This document indicates the planning and execution of 13 interventions for historic sites and buildings and provides details concerning phases of work and funds invested and to be invested between 1950 and 1953 [20] (Figure 11).

<u>COMISION DE CONSERVACION - REFACCIONES A MONUMENTOS HISTORICOS.</u>		
acerca de la reunión de la Comisión de Conservación, presidida por el Director	PEREIRA, da cuenta	
Gral. de Obras Públicas, Consejero don Oscar Tenham, e integrada por don Eugenio		
Pereira y por don Roberto Montandon en calidad de asesor informante.-		
El señor PEREIRA expresa su complacencia por la magnífica colaboración que el Consejo ha encontrado en la persona de don Oscar Tenham, quien, para las labores del Consejo, ha puesto a su disposición los recursos de la Dirección Gral. de Obras Públicas.-		
El Consejo toma conocimiento de la distribución hecha por dicha Comisión, de los fondos que para refacción de monumentos históricos, se contempla en el presupuesto de la Dirección Gral. de Obras Públicas y que ascienden a la suma de \$ 500.000.-		
a)- para limpieza, consolidación y refacción de los FUERTES ESPAÑOLES del estuario del Río Valdivia: +..... \$ 180.000.-		
b)- para levantamiento del pleno; despeje de las ruinas y consolidación del PUKARA DE LASANA..... \$ 60.000.-		
c)- para refacción y restauración de la IGLESIA DE TARAPACÁ 180.000.-		
d)- para refacción del campanil de MATILLA..... \$ 30.000.-		
TOTAL.....	\$ 450.000.-	
Quedaría en consecuencia un saldo de \$ 50.000.-, para resforzar oportunamente, si fuese preciso, algunos de los ítems de esta distribución, o invertirlo en otro monumento, según las circunstancias o necesidad.-		

Figure 1. Extract from the minutes of the National Monuments Council session of 24 April 1950 documenting part of the first budget allocated for restorations by the General Directorate of Public Works. The first sites identified for restoration using these funds are detailed. Source: Centro de Documentación Roberto Montandón Paillard, Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales.



Figures 2 and 3. Photographs showing the deteriorated state of the forts of Valdivia in the early twentieth century. Source: Biblioteca Nacional Digital / Ricardo Jiménez. *Fortalezas antiguas en Corral*. Obtained from <http://www.bibliotecanacionaldigital.gob.cl/>



Figure 4. Restoration of the Niebla Fort during the 1950s. The excavations required to expose the walls of the fortifications, which had become buried, can be seen on the right of the photograph. Photograph included in *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y de Trabajos* No. 11, dated 24 April 1952, p.14. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales / Roberto Montandón Paillard.

Figure 5. Restoration of the Niebla Fort in the 1950s. Reconstruction of buried walls to a height of 1 metre. Photograph included in *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y de Trabajos* No. 16, dated March 1953, p.7. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales / Roberto Montandón Paillard.



Figures 6 and 7. The Pukará de Lasana during the restoration works carried out in the 1950s. The photograph on the left shows men working on the project. The photograph on the right shows the completed works, including partially rebuilt walls. Photographs included in *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y de Trabajos* No. 11, dated 24 April 1952, pp.8–9. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales / Roberto Montandón Paillard.



Figure 8. View of the interior of the Matilla Bell Tower prior to works carried out in the 1950s. Photograph described as “*interior of the bell tower, looking up towards the dome, whose centre has collapsed*”. Photograph included in *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y de Trabajos* No. 9, dated 5 November 1951, p.7. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales / Roberto Montandón Paillard.

Figure 9. View of the interior of the Matilla Bell Tower following structural works in reinforced concrete carried out in the 1950s. Photograph included in *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y de Trabajos* No. 12, dated 20 June 1952, p.6. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales / Roberto Montandón Paillard.



Figure 10. Photograph of the Matilla Bell Tower and Church, early twentieth century. This photograph served as reference for the reconstruction of the bell tower dome in the 1950s. Photograph included in *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y de Trabajos* No. 12, dated 20 June 1952, p.5. Source: Archivo Fotográfico Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales / Roberto Montandón Paillard.

Figure 11. “Schematic chart of completed and ongoing repair and restoration works to Archaeological and Historic Monuments, and of imminent and planned works to date. State of progress, February 1953”. This chart was drawn in 1952 by Roberto Montandón Paillard. Annex to *Boletín Interno de Sesiones y Trabajos* No. 13, dated October 1952. Source: Centro de Documentación Roberto Montandón Paillard, Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales.

5. Conclusions

The 1950s were an important period in the history of architectural restoration in Chile, as it was then that the planning and execution of State-funded work to heritage sites began to take place on a large scale. A communication of 1949 from the National Monuments Council to the Ministry of Public Works states: “*The council [...] is determined to create a coordinated plan of action for the protection and repair of historic monuments in order to best preserve them*” [26]. This plan was a pioneering initiative that gave rise to various heritage projects in the mid-twentieth century, made possible by effective management and planning through a partnership between the two public institutions.

Interest in the conservation of certain periods of history is reflected in the first sites selected for protection, a process that began shortly after the formation of the Council. The restoration works commenced sometime later. Motivation for these early works was probably to re-establish and consolidate a certain image of national memory and to repair pre-existing elements that had been abandoned or affected by earthquakes in the intervening time. It is interesting to note here a possible relationship between the preservation of local heritage and the establishment of a “sense of nation”.

Attention was focused during the period on the conservation of colonial history in the form of religious buildings and military fortifications. However, other projects sought to emphasise the value of buildings and sites that represented much older periods of local history, as was the case with the Pukará de Lasana, a pre-Hispanic archaeological site.

As a specific discipline in itself, architectural restoration in Chile required specialised attention that differed greatly from other types of project that were underway during the period. Advance studies, expert consultation, and research into the history and conservation status of the sites were crucial to the success of these early interventions, which were duly planned in various stages.

Photographic and documentary evidence provided by local archives presents a general overview of interventions conducted under Decree-Law No. 651 of 1925. These works reflect an important moment in the history of the discipline, illustrating the interest and knowledge that existed at the time in terms of heritage intervention methodologies and criteria. It is clear that a variety of projects and solutions were proposed on a case-by-case basis according to advance analysis and studies that sought to resolve the conservation issues specific to each monument.

Architectural restoration in Chile continues to be an area of considerable professional and academic interest. In recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of State-funded projects for the recovery and promotion of built heritage. Knowledge of the early steps taken within the discipline enriches our perspective and serves to shape future approaches to local heritage conservation.

Acknowledgments

ANID / FONDECYT, Concurso de Iniciación, Project No. 11190017.

This article is the result of ongoing historical research entitled “*Primeras Restauraciones Arquitectónicas Ejecutadas por el Estado de Chile a través del Consejo de Monumentos Nacionales: Autenticidad y Memoria a Mediados del Siglo XX*”.

My thanks go to research assistants Yoisa Barra and Alan Jorquera for their collaboration; to the Rehabilitation and Restoration thesis students at the School of Architecture, Universidad de Santiago de Chile; to the Roberto Montandón Paillard Documentation Centre (CEDOC) and the Photographic Archive of the National Monuments Council for granting permission to access their archives; to Erwin Brevis, Technical Secretary of the National Monuments Council; to Ximena Alcavil, Juan Carlos Gutiérrez and José Miguel Painequeo of the Roberto Montandón Paillard Documentation Centre and Photographic Archive.

*The \$ symbol corresponds to the local currency in circulation in Chile at the time: the Chilean Peso.

** National Monuments Council session minutes post-1954 (available at www.monumentos.gob.cl) make no reference to the repair fund identified in the present research. Documentation of sessions held under Decree-Law No. 651 is available online, covering the periods from 1935 to 1954 and from 1961 to 1968. It is possible that other works of this type, undiscovered during the course of the present research, are also documented.

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