

## CONTEMPORARY BUGIS WEDDINGS IN THE REGENCY OF SOPPENG: AN ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL SEMIOTICS

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine and analyze contemporary Bugis wedding processions. This was a qualitative study conducted in the regency of Soppeng in the province of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Six individuals served as primary informants for the purposes of this study. Data was obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Results showed that Bugis marriage rituals in the regency of Soppeng generally go through three stages: pre-wedding, wedding, and post-wedding. Each stage of the ritual is conducted utilizing various media that contain their own values and meanings. Symbolic interaction using these traditional media at each stage of the marriage process was broken down and analyzed using a cultural semiotic approach. A qualitative research approach was utilized for discussion of the research problem.

**Keywords:** Marriage, contemporary, cultural semiotics, Bugis.

### INTRODUCTION

As humans, we constantly interact with other human beings on a daily basis. It's only natural that we, as social creatures, want for the long-term company of another. This need for a permanent partner led to the creation of "marriage", essentially life contracts between a man and a woman. Marriage between two people, a man and a woman, holds meaning that is sacred and holy. However, some people consider marriage simply a means of unifying two individuals. If these people only understood the complex significance of marriage, then they would have happiness in their home and families would never divorce.

Marriage can mean many things to many people, and this meaning is shaped by the rules that apply in their environment. Even though a wedding is, at its core, a means for bringing two people together for a specific purpose, it usually involves a cultural, legal, or religious ceremony that serves to make the marriage bond official. There are many varieties of wedding ceremonies determined by your ethnicity, nationality, religion, culture, or social class as allowed by religious or general law. Marriages are commonly documented in writing - be they officialized by cultural, legal, or religious ceremony - as an official proof of the marriage bond between a man and woman.

There are many different kinds of wedding ceremonies in Indonesia from a variety of different traditions and cultures. The performing of traditional ceremonies or rituals contains a special meaning to the local community that supports it. Besides functioning as a means of

respecting their ancestors and expressing gratitude to God, such events are also places for socializing and cementing cultural values that exist and prevail in the daily lives of the locals. The richness of traditional wedding ceremonies in Indonesia, considered sacred by their communities with heavy use of cultural symbols, make them interesting subjects for study. Marriage is a very important part of life because it is so strongly related to basic human values. Because of this, marriage is the sacred duty of mankind and necessary for the development of quality descendants that are of value to their community. This is an unwritten implication of the marriage procession. All activities and items in a traditional ceremony are symbols that hold special meaning to those performing the wedding. They pray to God so that their prayers may be granted.

Symbols in the form of physical objects are inseparable from the activities and actions of man. In fact, humans use symbols as a medium for communication. This usage of symbols in manifestation of culture is done with complete awareness, understanding, and great appreciation for that which is passed on through tradition from one generation to the next.

Just as with other regions in South Sulawesi, wedding processions in the regency of Soppeng vary in their execution. From pre-wedding to post-wedding, every stage is loaded with symbolic meaning.

Every element of a culture acts as a cultural symbol. A few of these many elements also act as elements of symbolic rituals, including: objects, occasions, behavior, color, sounds, and smells.

The regency of Soppeng to this day upholds and preserves its local customs, including those customs and traditions relating to weddings and marriage. An ethnic Bugis Soppeng wedding must go through multiple steps. Each step in the process holds symbolic meaning. The legitimacy of a marriage, according to custom in the regency of Soppeng, must fulfill certain customary requirements. These requirements include a wedding dowry, an amount regulated by Islamic law, because the rule of religion is the highest order of law that man must abide by. Despite this appreciation for historical customs and traditions, some aspects of a traditional Bugis Soppeng wedding -- such as the usage of certain items and cultural artifacts -- have fallen out of favor or undergone changes.

This shift is just one side effect of the change in social structure and cultural patterns of a community, and is a common phenomenon experienced in every community. These changes occur because of the essence and basic nature of man to seek change.

### **Methodology**

The selection of informants on marital problems in Soppeng District was determined by using purposive sampling, which is to set informants based on the specific objectives of the research. This guarantees informants have a broad and deep knowledge of the problems under study. These informants come from the Department of Tourism and Culture, community religious figures, and other influential figures from the community. Supporting data was collected from organizers of marriage ceremonies that took place during the research period.

### **Results**

Laws and values were created to regulate the practices, behaviors, socialization patterns, and customs that bind an individual to their community. There are several rituals involved in the conducting of a traditional Bugis Soppeng wedding ceremony. It is important to understand

the meaning and intent behind these rituals as rituals that praise the glory of the Almighty, or as ceremonies that pay respect to parents or other members of the community.

The Bugis wedding ceremony in Soppeng is a type of Bugis ritual that has been well preserved throughout the years though it has undergone some changes to adapt it to the modern era. The traditional Bugis Soppeng wedding procession consists of multiple stages. These stages involved series of activities that must be performed in a specific order, and is carried out by members of the Bugis Soppeng community who adhere closely to local custom. Most of the Bugis Soppeng community still partake in such activities because they are, naturally, worth conducting due to the values they hold that are rich with meaning, such as prayers that the two betrothed may cultivate a harmonic eternal bond, and to create a peaceful relationship that ties two families together.

Traditional Bugis Soppeng wedding processions usually undergo 3 stages: the pre-wedding, the wedding proper, and the post-wedding. The many ethnicities and tribes in South Sulawesi generally consider the wedding ceremony as a sacred event of great spiritual value.

In the execution of these three stages, there are elements of each stage that are traditional. A Bugis rhyme goes: "Iyyami kuala sappo unganna panasae na belona kalukue" which translates to "I take to fence my home honesty and purity."

### **Bugis Soppeng Wedding Tradition**

Marriage is the best way to make someone you would consider an "other" into a "non-other" (tennia tau laeng). This often takes happens when two friends or business partners agree to wed their child to the other's or set an arranged wedding. A wedding takes place between two individuals of the same family, such as between cousins be they parallel cousins (related from one side of their family) or, ideally, cross-cousins (related by both sides of the family).

Marriage between first cousins is said to be "too hot" and rarely take place except for among nobility. The Bugis Soppeng people prefer marriages between second or third cousins. In the Bugis Soppeng traditional marriage system:

Assialang Maola, namely the marriage of first-degree cousins, either from the father's or mother's side of the family.

Assialanna Memang, that is the marriage of a second-degree cousins on either the father's or mother's side of the family.

Ripaddeppe mabelae, which is the marriage of at least third-degree cousins. This is usually used to describe a marriage between two individuals of indeterminable, though undoubtable, family relation.

However, as time has passed, shifts in how people socialize and communicate, due in large part to the widespread adoption of new communication technologies, has resulted in greater freedom in ways for people to integrated and adapt socially. This has affected how we choose our partners. Kalau dahulu perjodohan terjadi karena adanya ikatan kekerabatan dari kedua belah pihak, namun pada saat ini perjodohan itu ditentukan sendiri oleh anak-anak kita dan mereka sudah tidak mau diatur sebagaimana sistem perjodohan orangtua kita dahulu.

### **Stages of a Bugis Soppeng Wedding Ceremony**

There are three stages in a Bugis Soppeng wedding: the pre-wedding, the wedding proper, and the post-wedding.

### **Pre-wedding**

**Mapessek-pessek.** Nowadays, the act of mapessek-pessek is an uncommon one. The majority of marriage candidates are already decided by the parents of the prospective bridegroom who pre-select a candidate that they feel they are very familiar with. In some cases, the female candidate and the male candidate are already quite close.

When a young Bugis man is interested in a Bugis woman, he makes a request of his parents to put forward an official proposal to the girl's family. The young man's family deliberate over the viability of this young woman and ask for the opinions of relatives who are familiar with the young woman's family. If these relatives are willing, they accompany the young man to the young woman's parents' home. They bring gifts and an official statement of their intent to marry the young woman. This visit to the young woman's home is known as "mapessek-pessek" (becoming close). If the young woman's family agrees, then both families determine a time for the madduta ceremony (proposal). This method is considered more civilized than if the young man directly communicated intent to marry to the young woman's family or if the young woman discussed such marriage plans directly to her own parents. However, if this young man is an outsider from another area or region then it is acceptable for the young man to directly deliver a proposal to the parents of the young woman he intends to marry. However, whether or not this young man's proposal is accepted or rejected is dependent on more than parental approval. The proposal's acceptance -- or rejection -- and the dowry amount may only be determined by family forum during the official proposal ceremony.

**Mammanuk-manuk (finding a candidate).** Mammanuk-manuk is a person who acts as a mediator between the two families. The mammanuk-manuk determines a meeting place and time with the young woman's parents and forwards this information to the young man's family. If the young man's family agrees then the madduta (official proposal) can take place on that date.

**Mattiro (becoming a guest).** Mattiro menas to watch or observe from a distance or Mabbaja laleng (make way). The family and relatives of the young man conduct a ceremonial visit to the young woman's parents' home. If the young man is deemed worthy, then the procession may continue.

Usually, the young man is also present during mattiro. For the reception, the young woman's family usually prepares an assortment of drinks and snacks. These drinks are usually brought out from the kitchen by the young woman herself. This is, of course, with the permission of the representatives of the young woman's family. However, the young woman is not told of the purposes of this scenario. This is where the young man and young woman may directly view one another, or even be introduced by the representatives of both parties.

The term "mattiro" is usually used to describe the act of entering a wild, untamed forest. What is meant by "making way" in the wedding procession is to carefully deliberate the potential of continuing the proposal process -- or ending it outright.

**Madduta (wooing).** Madduta is an official customary wooing process. A long time ago, madduta was performed many times until both sides come to agreement. In madduta, representatives of the young man's family visit the home of the young woman to deliver a message detailing the topics of discussion and agreements arrived upon during the mapessek-pessek and mammanuk-manuk.

At this stage, the young woman's family will invite their closest, most trusted relatives to help deliberate the proposal and any information and impressions regarding the young man and his family. Once the To Madduta (envoy) arrives, they are met and invited to sit in a place prepared for the meeting. Thus, discussions begin between the To Madduta and the To Riaddutai (representatives of the family of the proposed). The young woman's family is the first to speak, then the young man's family may express their intention.

Before the wooing can commence, one or two members of the young man's family are selected to "make way" (mabbaja laleng) for the young man's representatives. They arrive at the young woman's home ahead of the rest of the representatives and inform the young woman's family of the young man's intent to begin the wooing process.

Those selected to conduct mabbaja laleng are trusted to discuss with the young woman's family of the following things:

- a) Whether or not the young woman is promised to another. In the Bugis language they call this "tessappo teppabbatang" which means "ungated and without barrier".
- b) Whether or not the young woman's family is open to potentially accepting the young man's proposal.
- c) When the young woman's family would be willing to receive the proposal.
- d) Where will they receive the proposal? In their own home or the home of a relative?
- e) Mappasiarekeng

Mappasiarekeng means to "bind tightly" meaning both parties agree upon the stipulations and requirements discussed during the previous rituals.

Mappasiarekeng, also known as mappettu, is the stage before the wedding where the families of the two betrothed form a binding social contract with regards to the agreements arrived upon during previous discussions. These agreements and stipulations are reviewed for the last time during the mappasiarekeng/mappetuada, and final discussions regarding the wedding ceremony take place. The topics discussed include:

**Mattanra esso.** Mattanra esso (determining the date) is determining of the date of the wedding. This is done with consideration to a number of factors such as when the two families have time in their schedules. If either of the families are farmers then the wedding is usually agreed to take place after the harvest. If the proposal takes place during the paddy season, typically the day of the wedding is chosen to be on the day after the planting of the paddies or after harvest. The date is occasionally chosen to fall on the birthday of the bride as it is typically the young woman's family that handles most of the wedding/party arrangements. However, because the ethnic Bugis of Soppeng are considered by many researchers to be very tolerant, open, and democratic in their decision-making, the day of the wedding is usually chosen to fall on a time that is most convenient for both parties.

**Balanca.** Balanca (spending money) or dui' menre' is an amount of money given by the groom's family to the bride's family to be used for funding the wedding ceremony and other related purchases. Dui' menre' is not considered part of the dowry but is a customary expenditure that is considered mandatory. The amount is discussed beforehand.

Dui' menre' is the gifting of money from the groom's family to the young woman's family as a show of respect. What is meant by respect in this instance is a show of appreciation to the young woman's family through the funding of an extravagant wedding using this dui' menre'. The gifting of this dui' menre' functions as a shift of economic wealth because dui' menre' holds high social value. The woman holds a position of high social standing and is to be

respected. Dui' menre' is a gift given by the young man's family to his bride-to-be's family to pay for the necessities of the wedding ceremony.

The amount of dui' menre' influences social standing depending on the amount gifted. Middle- to lower-class families can quickly gain social status simply by receiving a large amount of dui' menre' from the groom's family. Besides social status, other factors that influence expectations on the amount of dui' menre' include nobility, economic status, level of education, and the planned size of the wedding ceremony. This can often become a problem. Most families only want to marry off their daughters for large sums of money in order to reap the social status benefits.

**Sompa (mahar).** Mahar is a mandatory gift from the groom to the bride that acts as a physical manifestation of his love. The aim is to evoke similar feelings within her. This dowry may take the form of an object or a service (such as the freeing of slaves).

Mahar in Islam is considered an expression of love. Mahar is also a sign of the respectability of a woman. Mahar is a sort of gift given by the young man's family to the young woman to whom he is betrothed. Mahar is also a form of acknowledgment of the kindness and honor of a woman.

Mahar, or sompa/sunreng is a requirement of Bugis Soppeng weddings. This is in line with the requirements for marriage as taught in Islam. The legitimacy of a wedding depends on whether or not there is a mahar.

The amount of the mahar depends on the social status of the woman and acts as a real valuation of her social worth. Dowry may take the form of land, orchards, heirlooms, boats, jewelry and gold, prayer accessories. Each of these holds important meaning in the wedding ceremony of the Bugis.

The amount and value of the mahar or dowry is influenced by the social standing of the young woman and her family.

There is no minimum or maximum amount for mahar in Islam. The groom must offer an amount that is within his means.

In the past, mahar was very strongly associated to the social standing of a woman and her family, thus the amount and the details of the payment were calculated very carefully. Although this is still practiced now, the process is not nearly as strict or rigorous as it used to be. There are different "levels" of sunreng (mahar): the descendant of nobility is expected to receive 88 reals, middle-class families (to sama) are offered 44 reals, and lower-class families may get 20 reals.

**Mappacci or Tudang Penni.** Mappacci comes from the word "pacing" which means "clean". Mappacci means "to clean oneself." This is a symbolic ritual that involves the usage of henna leaves. This ceremony is held during the evening and is thus also known as "Wenni Mappacci" or "night cleaning". The conducting of the Mappacci ceremony symbolizes the preparedness of the two betrothed to build a new home together. The entire ritual involves several steps: mappacing ati (cleansing of the heart), mappacing nawa-nawa (cleansing of the mind), mappacing pangkaukeng (cleansing of behavior/actions), mappacing ateka (cleansing of the faith).

On the night of the mappacci -- typically the night before the wedding proper -- the families hold prayers of congratulations, a close relative may read through the entire Al-Qur'an, reading of the barasanji (prayers and retellings of the story of the prophet Muhammad). Before the mappacci process itself can begin, the bride must be dressed in the traditional marriage garments of the Bugis people. To commence the Mappacci, a pillow is placed before the bride. This pillow is a symbol of respect. The pillow is symbolically associated with the head, which is the central point of all human activity. This symbol expresses the hope that the bride and groom may further know and understand themselves as noble creations of the Creator.

Atop the pillow is placed an odd amount of silk sarongs. Sarongs are interpreted to represent integrity and perseverance. Integrity and perseverance two traits necessary for the weaving of a silk sarong. Every day they must weave and arrange thread after thread into a sarong that is fit for wear. The bride and groom may hopefully learn integrity and perseverance from the humble weaver and make use of it in their home. Occasionally, the sarong is a symbol that represents a cover of shame for the Bugis-Makassar people. It represents a hope that the young woman may safeguard her dignity and not bring shame to her family and people.

Atop the sarongs is placed a banana leaf. The banana leaf holds significant meaning to mankind as a whole. An important nature of the banana leaf is that it will not die or wilt before producing a new shoot. This symbolizes the primary purpose of marriage: to give birth to a new generation. Another characteristic of the banana: one banana tree can be enjoyed by many. The hope is that with this marriage the bride and groom will be of value and use to many.

Above the banana leaf, a jackfruit leaf is placed. The jackfruit leaf, according to Bugis custom, holds important meaning. In Bugis literature, there is a rhyme that goes "Duami kuala sappo, unganna panasae na belona kanukue" (Only two do I use to build my fence, the jackfruit's follower and jewelry of nails". When analyzed and broken down, mappacci is a symbol of purity, consciousness, and obligation.

The fruit of the jackfruit in the Bugis language is "lempu" which also means "honest". The Bugis word for "jewelry of nails" is pacci which is a near homonym for "pacing" which means "to cleanse". Thus, purity and honesty are the fortresses of life because purity is radiated by the heart and manifests itself in honesty.

### **The Wedding Proper (Marriage Contract)**

There are several rituals that take place during the wedding proper. These rituals include:

**Mappaenre Botting.** Mappaenre Botting, or Menreq Kawing, is the visiting of the groom to the home of the bride to be married. This ritual is the core of the entire wedding ceremony. Before leaving for the bride's home, the groom must dress himself in traditional Bugis wedding garb with the aid of a young boy known as "Ana' botting" or "passeppi" who is dressed in similar wear

Behind the groom walk multiple rows of people who are tasked with carrying the gifts to be presented to the bride.

The young man is accompanied to his bride's house by his relatives, neighbors, and close friends. Included amongst the groom's escorts are his close relatives, young boys and girls tasked with delivering traditional cakes and fruits, and young girls carrying gifts such as

clothing and jewelry for the bride-to-be. The entourage also brings the dowry during this ritual. Madduppa Botting.

Madduppa botting is the welcoming of the groom by the bride's family. Before departing for the bride's home, the groom's entourage must first meet the wife's welcoming party (the details of this meeting are usually discussed beforehand). If the location where the groom must meet the bride is far from the groom's home, then both parties must come to agreement on the groom's expected time of arrival. This welcoming party communicates to the groom's entourage that the bride is prepared to receive them at her home.

One or two padduppa botting, usually uncles of the bride, are assigned to receive the groom's entourage and guide them to the location where the marriage vows will be exchanged.

**Marriage Vows.** The swearing of marriage vows is performed by the father or guardian of the bride, sometimes the local imam or other community figure selected by the Ministry of Religion. There must be a witness from each party. Before the exchange of wedding vows, the groom is typically seated on the lap of an elder from the bride's family. This is a sign that the groom has been accepted into the bride's family.

There must be a witness from each party. The group sits cross-legged in preparation for the wedding vows. The exchange of wedding vows typically begins with a reading from the Holy Qur'an followed by a review of relevant marriage documentation by person officiating the wedding. If all documents are in order, the papers are signed and the vows. These documents are signed by the groom, bride, the bride's guardian, and the two witnesses. At this time, a ceremony marking the transfer of guardianship from the bride's parents/guardians to the local imam/officiator.

**Mappasikarawa.** Mappasikarawa is a series of activities intended to familiarize the groom with his new bride. The groom is escorted by an elder from his family into his bride's room. This is also known as mappalettu nikkah.

Upon arriving in the bride's room, the elder instructs the groom to make physical contact with specific parts of the bride's body. The body part that is touched varies:

- The crown of her head, sometimes the groom is asked to kiss this part of her body. This establishes his position as head of the family who will not receive orders from his new wife.
- The upper part of the breast, a gesture symbolizing prayer that the new family will receive blessings as tall as mountains.
- Hand shake or touching of the thumbs, that the new pair will be understanding and forgiving toward one another.
- Touching of the bride's ear so that the new wife will always listen to her husband's word.

**Marellau Addampeng.** Once mappasikarawa is complete, the ceremony continues with the asking of forgiveness. In this part of the ceremony, both the bride and groom ask forgiveness from the bride's parents and all close relatives present. Once this is done, the new pair are guided to the alter where they stand side-by-side and receive congratulations and prayers from guests and relatives. Usually, this is immediately followed by the wedding reception and entertainment.



### c. Post-wedding

**Mapparola/marola.** Mapparola or marola is also a very important part of the wedding procession in Bugis culture. Mapparola is the visiting of the new wife and her family to the home of her new husband. This activity is usually performed after the exchange of wedding vows, typically a day or two after depending on discussions between the two parties.

Both parties send invitations to close friends and family asking for their presence at the mapparola. The wife's family asks close family to join them in escorting the new husband and wife to the home of the husband's parents. The husband's parents ask close family and friends to be part of their welcoming party for the wife's entourage.

The "makkasiwiang" ritual usually takes place during the mapparola. Makkasiwiang is the gifting of sarongs from the wife to her husband's parents and siblings. Makkasiwiang is conducted in the husband's room. The wife is accompanied by indo' botting in the delivery of the sarongs to the parents and siblings of her husband. In Bugis culture, this gift is often returned to the wife with an added gift of value fitting for the economic status of the household.

**Massita Baiseng (meeting family).** Massita baiseng is when the husband's family and close friends visit the home of the bride's parents. This activity is done with the purpose of building a bond between the two families.

In Bugis Soppeng culture, once the wedding reception is completed, the new husband and wife spend their first night together in the home of the wife's parents. The following night is spent at the husband's parents' home. Massita baiseng may be conducted by the husband's parents or a chosen representative of the family. Massita baiseng also serves as a fetching ritual where the new pair are picked up from the wife's parents' home to mabbeni tellumpenni, or "stay three nights", at her husband's family's home.

Traditionally, mabbeni tellumpenni truly lasted for three nights. However, modern versions of the ritual only last for a single night, and the pair then spend the following night at the home of the wife's parents. During the mabbeni tellumpenni, the new wife is typically showered with gifts from her husband's family.

**Massiara Kubburu' (visiting of the graves).** The "visiting of the graves" is not part of the traditional wedding ceremony, but is a common practice in Bugis culture. A week after the wedding, both families pay respects to their ancestors and generations before them by visiting the graves of family members.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the descriptions detailed in the above writing, we can conclude the following about that the traditional Bugis Soppeng wedding ceremony:

First. The Bugis Soppeng wedding procession is made up of three stages: pre-wedding, the wedding proper, and post-wedding. These three stages involve several long and time-consuming steps requiring full participation from close friends and relatives of both parties. The Bugis Soppeng people consider these three stages sacred and holy, a celebration of the relationships between man and his creator, the relationships between humankind, and the home life of a new marriage. Because of this, the values contained in each stage of the Bugis Soppeng wedding procession encompass:

- Sacredness, this is evident in many rituals, such as the reading of Al-Barazanji, mappacci, and others. These rituals are considered sacred and are prayers for safety sent to Allah subhanu wa ta'ala.
- The respect of women. This is evident in the wooing rituals conducted by the groom. This shows an active effort to honor the potential bride by asking for the blessings of her parents. This honoring of the woman is also evident in the gifting of a wedding dowry in the form of valuable items and large amounts of cash from the groom to his bride's family. The mahar is representative of the honor and respectability of a women.
- Kinship. To the Bugis people, a wedding is not just the unifying of two individuals of different sex, but also a husband-wife relationship with much greater meaning. Thus, marriage is a means for building and a sense of kinship between families.
- Gotong-royong (Mutual Assistance) The value of gotong-royong is core to the performing of a Bugis wedding ceremony. Gotong-royong is a willingness to help friends, family, and neighbors. This can be seen in the ready involvement and participation of friends, family, and neighbors in the wedding procession. They not only provide physical work and share thoughts and ideas, but they also help fund the ceremony.
- Social Status A wedding is not simply a celebration and reception to the Bugis Soppeng people, but also a signifier of social status. The more luxurious and resplendent the wedding ceremony, the higher the social status of the families that hold it. Because of this, it is common for families to treat wedding ceremonies as a means for improving their social standing in their community.

Second, the use of traditional objects with cultural symbolic meaning in the Bugis wedding procession, such as henna leaves, jackfruit leaves, banana shoots, pillows, and sarongs has deep philosophical meaning relating to the behavior and interactions between men and between man and God. Additionally, the use of these items in wedding rituals are meant as a giving of a prayers that the two families may be unified in peace and happiness for the rest of their lives.

Third. Contemporary Bugis wedding ceremonies, though still implementing much of the same rituals and symbolism, have undergone gradual change over time. This is in part due to the increasing rarity of symbolic items like patti and tai bani. Contemporary weddings are perfectly content to replace these difficult-to-find objects with other, more common symbolic items that don't substantially reduce its meaning. Naturally, these changes occur as an intrinsic part of the change conditions of the modern era.

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