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Hands at work in Magna Graecia : the Amykos Painter and his Workshop

I have been hesitating quite a long time about the way to introduce to you the purpose and the method of this study on the Amykos painter. I am very aware myself, indeed, of the complexity of the universe of South Italian vase-painters, and therefore, of the difficulty to map it clearly. Before beginning to work on the early South Italian workshops, I had spent a lot of years on Attic pottery, especially red-figure, and I must say that it appears to me as being an essential training to integrate the solid Beazleyan methodology for the study of the style, and secondly, to be able to adapt it – through the work of A.D. Trendall- to the specific phenomena offered by South Italian pottery.

The comparison with Attic pottery is a good starting point, however, since Athens' primary role as a model, both artistic and commercial, for the first red-figure South Italian production, and even later in the course of the development of the workshops, is obvious¹. When we study Attic black-figure and red-figure pottery, we have to deal with a nearly continuous phenomenon, going on from Early Archaism until the beginnings of Hellenism, and issued from one and only city, Athens; the result being that, with the help of Sir John Beazley's outstanding classification work, we can study and characterize the whole production and interpret it as a testimony of Athenian cultural or economical history. But within the panorama of the ancient Greek pottery productions, this long-lasting and uniform scheme is a remarkable exception, and whether in Boeotia, Laconia, North Greece, East Greece or Magna Graecia, more often do these productions appear and disappear in a limited span, sometimes lasting only, for instance, the life of a family workshop; this shows, amongst other, that the existence of the workshops is linked to the social communities for which they were working and to the needs of customers, whether religious or funerary or both following the cases.

Due to its geographical and historical layout, the world of Magna Graecia, where colonial cities founded by all parts of Greece live aside –and sometimes together with- the native Italic people, offers a very peculiar frame to the development of pottery workshops. Their study requires therefore a peculiar attention to their specific artistic features, such as the eclectism or the strong adaptability to foreign taste, that makes the task more difficult. There are a lot of traps and of surprises that arise each time one has to approach a new vase, and even

¹ Cfr. Denoyelle 2008 ; Lippolis 2008 ; Mannino 2008 ; Mugione 2008.

the awareness of how important is the role of the cultural and archaeological context is not always enough to avoid misunderstandings.

This is particularly true in the case of the Metaponto workshops, the first ones to have operated from the middle of the fifth century on the South Italian ground. The archaeological situation there, however, as we can see with the papers on the excavations of the necropoleis and of the *Kerameikos* and with the series of recent publications², provides an exceptionnally coherent frame to the study of the vases. Not only are we allowed to study the distribution of shapes and painters in the Greek *necropoleis*, and to compare it to the distribution on indigenous sites of the hinterland, but the data from the *kerameikos* can be used also to secure the place of production of the group of painters that A.D. Trendall had already placed virtually together in the Lucanian section of *Red-figured Vases of Lucania Campania and Sicily*³. Thanks to the crossing of decades of archaeological activity and of the connoisseurship approach, the case of Metapontine red-figure vases is one of the best documented in the whole Magna Graecia. We know that, even if material remains from his kiln have not been found, the Pisticci Painter is most probably the first to have produced in this area, followed by the Cyclops and Amykos Painters, who develop, from their initial formation with this very atticizing master, a different language, much more personal and somewhat liberated from Attic influence.

With about two hundred and fifty vases attributed to his hand nowadays, the Amykos Painter, whose activity is to be dated between 430 and 410 b.-C. *ca.*, appears, following Trendall's statement " the most important of the early Lucanian artists"⁴. His vases have been found from the Ionian coast -metapontine territory, Policoro-Heraclea - until the sites of Daunia, Peucezia and Messapia, but not only, since they reach also Calabria and Sicily (Thourioi, Syracuse and Camarina), Campania and Etruria (Marzabotto) and Albania (Apollonia)⁵. He is thought to have learnt his art with the Pisticci Painter, and then developed it the into a period of maturity at the end of which, maybe under Tarentine influence, he decorates vases of larger dimensions, with more ambitious compositions⁶. His influence has been detected on several minor painters like the Big-Head, Vaste, or Arnò Painters (on which I shall turn back later), as well as on Metapontine painters of the next generation, like the Dolon or Brooklyn-Budapest Painters.

Everything should then be in order if the examination of his *corpus* on the basis of Trendall's lists and plates, far from helping to individuate clearly this

² D'Andria 1980; Silvestrelli 1996; Carter 1998; Cracolici 2003.

³ LCS 1967, p. 81-106; LCS Supp. III 1983, p. 33-34.

⁴ Trendall 1989, p. 20; *cfr* Denoyelle, Iozzo 2009, p. 105-106.

⁵ LCS Supp. II 1973, p. 157, 247a

⁶ LCS 1967, p. 47-49.

important personality, wouldn't raise disturbing questions and doubts because of the heterogeneity of some stylistic features⁷, even easily distinguishable through the illustrations of *Lucania, Campania and Sicily*. Trendall's Amykos Painter, in fact, appears like a puzzle of several hands, some of them already identified as companions or followers, but some others not belonging to the workshop, or not even to the same production center. It seems to me worth indeed to try to demonstrate why the Amykos Painter, although seeming so familiar to our eyes, is in fact not well constructed, how we can reconstruct a new Amykos Painter and better define his workshop, and what kind of consequences this may have on the study of early Metapontine production and diffusion. And I should like to underline that this approach doesn't represent to me a deconstruction of Trendall himself, but a critical homage to his vast and pioneer work, in which he has set the bases from which one is allowed today, with the progress of archaeology, to go further.

The beautiful hydria in the Cabinet des Médailles of Paris, the name-vase of the painter (fig. 1-3)⁸, is the starting point for the discovery of the Amykos Painters's style. On the shoulder, the scene is organized around the three-dimensional figure of the giant Amykos – particularly striking with his melancholic face in three-quarter view- attached to a rock with all round him, not only the Argonauts and Medea, but also some satyrs and maenads, who are favourites characters of the painter's repertoire, as can be seen also in the inferior row, where they turn around the body of the vase in an animated procession getting to the god Dionysos, who stands under the vertical handle. Viewing the whole vase allows to appreciate the peculiar composition in two registers separated by a thick frieze of palmettes and lotus flowers accurately drawn. Several monumental hydriai of this type, all decorated following the same schemes, are due to his hand⁹. He has adapted a type of composition created by Attic painters and already treated by the Pisticci Painter, but giving it a very personal flavour and recreating it on hydriai and *nestorides*¹⁰. This type of transposition is typical of the creative process of the early South Italian Painters, and certainly, it has a precise purpose; let's remark that although the mythological or narrative scenes are rare in the work of the Amykos Painter, his two most personal and elaborated ones—the capture of Amykos and the suicide of Kanake- decorate the shoulder of a two registers hydria. As for the figure-style, typical are his round heads, slender bodied satyrs and the peculiar arrangement of women or old men's drapes, with a hand on the hips and the arm covered by the

⁷ Cfr. Jircik 1990, p. 61: "the development of the Amykos painter as an artist is puzzling in many respects"

⁸ Inv. 442; LCS 1967, p. 36, n° 136, pl. 12, 1-2.

⁹ LCS, p. 36, 36-137; 45, 221-223; Taranto Museo Nazionale Archeologico inv. 76084, from Botromagno tomb 2 (*Cat. Arte e artigianato* 1996, p. 407, 347.11).

¹⁰ Cfr. Oakley 1984; for a two- rows calyx krater by his hand, cfr. the fragments LCS Supp. III 1983, p. 13, 135c, with satyrs and maenads in the upper row, and youths pursuing women in the lower .

drape (fig. 4). On the shoulder of the hydria, near to the Boreades, the figure of the pilot of the ship Argo has also a very typical stance, adapted from the polycletean *canon* but with the arms too long and the two feet flat on the ground.

That the Amykos Painter is a Metapontine craftsman is confirmed by the finds of the Metaponto *kerameikos*: the fragments of an hydria with two rows show strictly similar features in the friezes as the frieze in the back part of the name-vase, and the same palmette at the root of the vertical handle¹¹. The scene on the body show youths pursuing women, a theme that recurs on some of his bell-kraters. The proximity with the Amykos hydria has been noted by the first editor of the fragments, F. D'Andria. From the characteristic features of these two vases, one can go deeper in the identification of the painter's style and figurative repertoire, on a nucleus of vases closely associated. He decorates kraters and medium size vases, such as hydriai, pelikai, amphorai as well as choes and skyphoi. In terms of quantity, his favourite shape is the bell-krater, very often decorated with silens and maenads, with "genre scenes" involving youths, women or warriors, or with athletes in the company of draped women, the so-called "Palaestra Group".

The general aspect of these encounters is very repetitive, involving often draped women shown in profile and nude youths shown in three-quarter view, one or the other holding strigilus or aryballos; but their apparent banality must not prevent us from observing that we are already dealing with in a type of language very different from the Attic one. The coarse type of draped women seen in full profile (fig. 5), for instance, would be, in an Attic perspective, used only on the side B of some vases¹², although here, they are like the female equivalent of the traditional draped youths, the drawing of the folds and borders being nearly the same (as well demonstrated on fig. 5-6). . When one has become familiar with these workshops, it appears obvious that this is far from being a misunderstanding of the Attic practices or of the valour of such stock-figures; early South Italian painters know very well the traditions of Attic red-figure, and particularly in the Metaponto workshops where exists a strong tradition of atticizing imitations. Instead, as will be the case with the highly codified series of funerary *naiskoi* scenes produced later in Taranto, but in a plainer way, both the technical treatment of the figures - coarse or elaborated, overpainted or in red-figure, bi or three-dimensional - and the accessories that they are holding concur to the making of sense. It is also interesting to note that the Amykos Painter's draped women may hold a *strigilus* like the men, whether they face an athlete or Eros himself, making think that athletic valours are not, amongst the clients of the Metapontine workshops, reserved to the male gender. This is an illuminating glimpse on how the composition of this scenes is to be explained by a

¹¹ D'Andria 1980, fig. 79; LCS supp. III 1983, p. 12, n° 136a

¹² Or on *kylikes* and small vases, but not on kraters.

cultural context which has its regional specificities¹³, a path in which the studies should be prosecuted, but always in close relationship with funerary archaeology.

But we are mostly dealing with style here and so have to turn back to it. Once having established the main characteristics and the first nucleus of the Amykos Painter, it is worth to examine Trendall's list in detail to understand why one has difficulties to find them again on some of the vases attributed to the same hand. Some of the vases – for instance the bell-krater in Naples (fig. 5-6)- don't raise any problem, since they are linked independantly with one or more of the features of this nucleus. A *chous* in the Ashmolean Museum of Oxford (fig. 7)¹⁴, where the profiles of the two youths are similar to the ones of some figures on the shoulder of the Amykos hydria, well illustrates the most elegant and fluide side of his drawing; it is an accurately drawn work, where the study of the *louterion* and of the chair reveals his interest for third dimension, rarely developed on the mass of his vases but present also on the Amykos hydria.

A *nestoris* once in Boston and now returned to Italy¹⁵, which belongs to the same period than the name-vase (fig. 8) , opens another chapter of our knowledge, as –although not being the only one at that time, as we shall see- it demonstrates the painter's ability, much earlier than his Tarentine colleagues, to adaptate his shapes and motives to the indigenous tradition, though using for the most part stock-figures of his repertoire, but representing also an indigenous warrior in his typical clothing. It is followed a little later by an other type of *nestoris* with two registers, with the usual scenes of pursuit in the low register and occasionnally, a scene with indigenous warriors in the upper zone¹⁶. On a British Museum exemplary¹⁷ appears a very unusual type of frieze, consisting in concentric ovals, separated by groups of binded leaves (fig. 9), which is called improperly by G. Schneider-Herrmann, in her study on the Apulian and Lucanian *nestorides*, a rope-pattern¹⁸, and which in its conception is totally alien to the language of Greek red-figured vases. It occurs three other times during the period¹⁹, and especially on a *nestoris* by the Dolon painter, dated from the beginnings of the 4th century, *i.e* again in Metaponto, about thirty years later. It is obviously a recreation of some Messapian or Peucetian motives, the

¹³ Soldner 2007 for an interpretation; *cfr.* also Fontannaz 2005, p. 137, note 68.

¹⁴ Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1965.136 ; *LCS* 1967, p. 42, n° 191, pl. 15,6.

¹⁵ *LCS* Supp. II 1973, p.156 , n° 137b, pl. XXX, 1 ; Schneider Herrmann 1980, fig. 43; *Cat. Nostoi* 2008, n° 48

¹⁶ Louvre K 539; Schneider Herrmann 1980, fig. 45; *CVA*, Louvre, 25, pl. 9-11

¹⁷ *LCS* 1967, p. 44, n° 216, pl. 17,2 ; Schneider-Herrmann 1980, fig. 48.

¹⁸ Schneider-Herrmann 1980, p. 52. For Trendall, *LCS* 1967, p. 103, this term instead is used to describe a frieze of short oblique strokes, typical for the Dolon Painter.

¹⁹ On the neck of the Apulian volute-crater by the Sisyphus Painter in Ruvo, *RVAp* I 1978, p. 16, 1/52, pl. 5,1; on the *nestoris* Richmond 81.71, *LCS* Supp. III, p. 15, 188a, pl. II, 2-4 ; on the *nestoris* British Museum F 176, *LCS* 1967, p. 103, n° 540 ; Schneider Herrmann 1980, fig. 48 by the Dolon Painter

concentric circle linked in a frieze or isolated being part of the traditional repertoire of the indigenous matt-painted pottery²⁰.

A last example of a vase that should be considered strictly by the hand of the Amykos Painter is the two registers hydria from Canosa in Bari, with, on the shoulder the suicide of an heroin, maybe inspired by the story of Kanake, related by Euripides in his lost tragedy, *Aiolos*²¹. Again there is a distinct treatment between the main figure, a dying woman lying on a bed with a sword in her hand, whose three-dimensional aspect makes one thing to a sculptural model, and most of the other figures, except maybe the one of the prostrated old woman to the right, which is also, in some way, reminiscent of sculpture.

The confrontation of this group with some other vases attributed by Trendall to the same hand shows that the limit has not been clearly established between the Amykos and the Cyclops Painters, an important artist of the same generation whose style evolves considerably from his earliest vases, that reflect his apprenticeship with the Pisticci Painter. On his early works, and even on later vases like the eponymous calyx-krater in the British Museum ²², the reverse drapes are still very rigid and schematic, and his figures are much more slender, with smaller heads, than the ones by the Amykos Painter, from whom he is easily distinguishable. But at a time where, probably, he begins to collaborate with this master, his whole style softens and the influence of the Amykos Painter is revealed by a lot of little details, like the head that become more round, the attitudes or the drapes. Nevertheless, differences remain, particularly the treatment of the buttocks, well marked or the typical triangular shape of the right arm under the mantle of some draped figures (fig. 10). These features are repeated and developed on a group of work all attributed to the Amykos Painter, which includes column-kraters, bell-kraters, nestorides and pelikai (fig. 11), and that one has obviously to move towards the Cyclops Painter's corpus. It could be appropriate to name it the "Altenburg Group", from the localization of the very typical column-krater in fig. 10²³. It is thus necessary, while we are retiring some vases from the amykean corpus in order to reattribute them to the Cyclops painter, to re-evaluate the role and the importance in the workshop production, of this painter. It is not an easy task, since questions still remain about the mature phase of this painter.

There is indeed, as already pointed by Trendall²⁴, a close stylistic relationship between the Cyclops and Palermo Painters, and also between the latter's and the

²⁰ Especially in Messapia, *cfr.* Yntema1990, fig. 50, 24 or 80.

²¹ LCS 1967, p. 45, n° 221, pl. 18.

²² LCS 1967, p. 27, n° 85, pl. 8, 1-2 ; Denoyelle, Iozzo 2009, p. 102-104.

²³ Altenburg, Staatliche Lindenau Museum 276 ; LCS 1967, p. 40, n° 176.

²⁴ LCS 1967, p. 52

Amykos Painter²⁵. But this strong ambiguity has not been resolved for every vase, as for instance, two nestorides with very close features, both attributed in the third supplement of *LCS*²⁶ to the Amykos Painter. The one on the left may instead be placed comfortably in the “Altenburg Group”, that is, Cyclops under amykean influence, while the other one, which points more towards the Palermo Painter, is to be replaced in this latter’s work. I shall not dwell here on a sense that I have had for years, that Cyclops and Palermo are but one and only individuality at two different times, because it would take too long to demonstrate. Suffice for the moment to work on the clearing up of their distinctive language and production in order to go on tracking the Amykos Painter’s one.

Finally, one of the vases that contributes the most to darken the vision of the Amykos Painter is one of his most famous, the volute-krater in Ruvo with the representation of Phineus and the Argonauts (fig. 12), that Trendall, places, in *LCS*, among “the Late vases”, with this commentary: “this is the most ambitious, but not the most successful vase of the painter”.²⁷ As I have already pointed several times, and this is shared today I think by some other scholars²⁸, this krater is for nothing an Amykean work, not even, I think, a Metapontine work, but it belongs to first Tarentine experiences of the Ornate Style; at least, it is linked with some little vases of the Reggio Group found in the Taranto necropolis and with the Policoro Painter. But it is interesting to understand why it has been placed in the Amykos painter’s “Late vases”, a section that includes, by the way, several vases that are to be reattributed to amykean followers.

The attribution is not Trendall’s one, but, as referred by him nowhere in his commentary, by Noel Moon-Oakeshott, in her article of 1919 on the Early South-Italian vase-painters²⁹; in this article, she attempts to create groups of painters on the basis of style – she was a pupil of Beazley and she has given their names to several early South Italian red figure painters- and also to give to every painter a list of vases. Her list of vases attributed to the Amykos Painter shows already a mixing with works by the Cyclops and Palermo Painters; and on the Ruvo krater she gives this commentary: “ [the Amykos painter] could indeed rise above mediocrity, for he painted also the well-known volute-krater with Phineus and the Harpies, though even there, we do not escape mean little faces and constricted joins”. This statement fits closely with the idea expressed later by Trendall: ambitious vase, but even so,

²⁵ *LCS* 1967, p. 51-52.

²⁶ *LCS* Supp. III, p. 390, n° 188a, pl. II, 2-4 and 188b.

²⁷ *LCS*, p. 47-48, pl. 19.

²⁸ Denoyelle 2002, p. 589, note 6 ; Denoyelle 2008, p. 344 ; Denoyelle, Iozzo 2009, p. 124 ; *cfr.* also Jircik 1990, p. 45-51.

²⁹ Moon 1929, p. 30-49 ; Trendall knew this study very well, and he quotes it as « important », for instance, in *AJA*, 66, 1962, p. 350.

not successful. What is particularly illuminating in this case is that maybe, the reason why Trendall has failed to place rightly the Ruvo krater is because he has not questioned the previous attribution. In fact he had not constructed himself the Amykos Painter, but had proceeded like a sculptor, by removing material, but without touching the core of the painter³⁰; and this maybe, as the processes of connoisseurship are as much based on psychological environment as on the agency of eyes, because of an implicit respect for Beazley, through his pupil. However, one feel relieved when realizing the possibility to put the krater elsewhere, and first, because this shape is not natural for this workshop, being generally only exceptional in the Metapontine production³¹, and especially with this rare type of metal-imitating handles. Secondly, because the disposition of the figures on different levels and the notations of landscape are also alien to the Metapontine experiences of this time.

The next problem is the one of the pupils and followers. The importance of the Amykos Painter as a workshop master and as creator of styles is greatly enhanced if one adds to the influences that we have pointed and to the few followers already identified by Trendall a series of misattributed vases that show various stages of apprenticeship or imitations of his work. First comes the Brooklyn-Budapest Painter, who obviously began his career in the Amykos workshop; an early bell-krater in the Pushkin Museum misattributed where the reverse is essential to identify his hand, at a very early stage of his career³².

Then, there is the Painter of the side A of the famous *Karneia* krater in Taranto, whose personality I have explored at length in an article of the *MEFRA* in 2002³³; a series of bell-kraters formerly attributed to the Amykos Painter show the *Karneia* Painter's typical treatment of the reverse youths, which, once identified, can be put in relationship with some fragments found in the Metaponto *kerameikos*, making firm that he has worked here too, at least for a while.

To the Vaste painter, a not very gifted follower already identified by Trendall³⁴, must also be reattributed several vases, in particular the well-known two-registers amphora in Naples with the departure of Bellerophon (fig. 13). Several vases by the Arnò painter³⁵ had been also misplaced among Amykos Painter's late vases, on which Trendall remarked a tendency to draw "flat-face" heads, but the anatomical style of the Arnò painter, once identified, is very distinctive and so is the drawing of his faces. A last hand, not previously identified although it has a few affinities with the so-called Big Head Painter, is to be found on an amphora in

³⁰ *Cfr.* McPhee 1998, p. 505

³¹ *LCS*, p. 48

³² *LCS* 1967, p. 34, n° 119; *CVA*, Moscow, Pushkin Museum, 3, pl. 1.

³³ Denoyelle 2002.

³⁴ *LCS* 1967, p. 60-61.

³⁵ Denoyelle 1993.

Naples (fig.14) and a few bell -kraters³⁶. It seems to be the one of a bit rustic pupil , but who works in close observance of the models established by the workshop master.

So, to attribute or un-attribute misplaced vases is a very satisfying activity when supported by various crossed evidences, but some results may appear fragile and furthermore, there is a point where the question raises : how to organize these observations in order to transmit them usefully to the research community? In other words, and this is the question already raised in the 2001 symposium in Naples, how to construct the post-Trendall era? How to replace or rather, update Trendall's enormous work? Isn't this work, despite its inevitable weaknesses, a more stable support for scholars and students, than a series of article and papers in which the painters are redesigned, the vases replaced? An archaeologist who finds some South Italian vases in his excavations would surely prefer to consult the volumes of *Apulia* or *Lucania* in the nearby university library to try classifying them, rather than collecting various updates in symposia papers or periodicals. This is a real methodological problem, however inherent to the practice of connoisseurship, all the more when it tries to be tuned into the other fields of archaeology. Important for the archaeology of production , for the study of commercial exchanges and roads may be the consequences of redesigning a workshop and bringing into light its identity and diffusion. In this case, for instance, we will be able to see better how many painters were trained, in the span of about 20 years, in this metapontine workshop, and how were created and diffused some peculiar types of shapes and iconography.

It will lead indeed to more structured informations on the role played by the workshop and not only, as Trendall pointed, in the development of Lucanian red-figure , but also, to my opinion, in the settling of red-figure workshops in various places of Magna Graecia, and beyond. We have seen, for instance, that there were some Etruscan proveniences for the amykean vases; in fact, this is mostly true for the Arnò Painter, whose identification with the Etruscan Perugia Painter, which I have attempted to demonstrate in the precedently quoted article of the *Revue archéologique*, leads to the proposition that the first red-figure workshops in Etruria have been created by craftsmen trained in the colonies of the Ionian coast, and in this case, probably Metaponto.

A similar problem is to be explored for the birth of some western workshops, like the Locri Group or for some Sicilian Painters, like the mysterious Santapaola Painter, whose one calyx-krater here has been found in Lipari (fig.15)³⁷. There are some striking stylistic links with the author of the amphora in Naples (fig.14), and

³⁶ Inv. 82264 ; LCS 1967, p. 48, n° 246, pl. 20,1 (Amykos Painter, late vases) ; bell-kraters : *cfr.* for instance *Sotheby's New York, Sale cat.*, December 14th 1993, n° 80.

³⁷ Bernabò Brea, Cavalier 1997, p. 12-13, fig. 1.

even if one cannot go until an identification , this resemblance is to be kept into mind, as having a sense; since the style is no other than the visible result of hidden but real processes.

This kind of investigations help to understand that – as I have tried to suggest in a recent Convegno of Taranto³⁸ - the phenomenon of the birth of the red-figure workshops in Magna Graecia and elsewhere is not to be reduced to an Athenian setting up here or there, as it was considered for a long time. It is much more complex and involves internal phenomena and transfers, as for instance the training role of some highly appreciated and distinctive workshops; and I speak here only of Metaponto, because at this period, it is the most obvious case, but Taranto or Paestum must have been also first rank schools for “foreign” vase-painters. At this time, the end of Vth century, the Amykos Painter’s workshop in Metaponto with its productivity, its technical quality, its adaptability, its large diffusion and the number of painters that have been trained there, may well have been one of the main points from where red-figure spreaded. This would explain some amykean reminiscences in various regional workshops, at first sight totally independant from that one.

So to reduce Amykos painter’s corpus is not to deprive him of his importance; on the contrary, it is to make it clearer. But as no one is able to devote today, as Trendall did, an entire life to South Italian workshops, it would be worth to concrete an international collaboration for all those- and there are some here –who work and go ahead on this subject.

³⁸ Denoyelle 2008.

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