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The Encomium of Polish Noblewomen in Jakub Sobieski's
Secular Funeral Speeches (the First Half of the 17th Century)*

Pochwała szlachcianki w świeckich mowach pogrzebowych
Jakuba Sobieskiego (I połowa XVII wieku)

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to present the distinctive features of Jakub Sobieski's funeral speeches and thus to fill the gap in the research on secular funeral speeches. The latter constitute a large section of old Polish oratory; a section only a few years ago recognised clearly in literary and historical research as distinct from the general funeral oratory and literary "output production," comprising separate and specific types of text. Jakub Sobieski, one of the most eminent speakers of the first half of the 17th century, delivered twenty-seven funeral speeches, five of those dedicated to women. In these speeches, following the rhetorical rules, he expressed the praises of the deceased noblewomen; these encomia envisaged defined role models of wives, mothers, and widows. Thus far, the aspects of old Polish female role models have almost exclusively been analysed using examples of funeral sermons, this study is the first to approach the issue from the perspective of nobles' speeches. The crucial point here is to recognise not the personal model, for it turns out to be basically invariable

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regardless of the oratory genre, but the manners of amplifying the *topoi* of women's praise. On the basis of the conducted analyses, it was discovered that Sobieski, in most cases (among the exceptions are the funeral speeches of Regina Żółkiewska and Anna Ostrogska) prefers to name and enumerate women's virtues without factual exemplification. This stands in stark contrast to both his speeches in praise of men, which abound in detailed descriptions of the merits and achievements of the deceased and to the homiletic practice of the era.

Keywords: Old Polish oratory, secular funeral speeches, encomia of noblewomen, funeral sermon, Jakub Sobieski

Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie specyfiki oracji pogrzebowych Jakuba Sobieskiego, a tym samym uzupełnienie luki w badaniach nad świeckimi oracjami pogrzebowymi, stanowiącymi ogromną część staropolskiego oratorstwa, które dopiero od kilku lat są wyraźnie wydzielane w badaniach literaturoznawczych i historycznych spośród ogółu pogrzebowej „produkcji” oratorskiej i literackiej jako osobne i specyficzne typy tekstów. Jakub Sobieski, jeden z najznakomitszych mówców I połowy XVII stulecia, wygłosił dwadzieścia siedem oracji pogrzebowych, z których pięć poświęconych było kobietom. Zgodnie z regułami retorycznymi zawarł w nich pochwały zmarłych szlachcianek, które to enkomiony złożyły się na określony wzór osobowy: żony, matki i wdowy. Elementy staropolskiego wzoru kobiety analizowane były do tej pory niemal wyłącznie na przykładach kazań pogrzebowych – niniejsze studium jest pierwszym, które ujmuje zagadnienie z perspektywy mów szlacheckich. Kluczowe jest tu rozpoznanie nie wzoru osobowego, gdyż ten – jak się okazuje – jest w zasadzie niezmienny niezależnie od gatunku oratorskiego, ile sposobów amplifikacji toposów kobiecej pochwały. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych analiz stwierdzono, że Sobieski w większości przypadków (do wyjątków należą mowy na pogrzebie Reginy Żółkiewskiej i Anny Ostrogskiej) preferuje nazwanie i wyliczenie cnót kobiecych pozbawione egzemplifikacji faktograficznej. Stanowi to jaskrawy kontrast zarówno w stosunku do jego laudacji męskich, obfitujących w szczegółowe opisy zasług i dokonań zmarłych, jak i do praktyki kaznodziejskiej epoki.

Słowa kluczowe: oratorstwo staropolskie, świeckie oracje pogrzebowe, pochwała szlachcianki, kazanie pogrzebowe, Jakub Sobieski

The outset of the 17th century marked a true expansion of the secular oratory in the Polish and Lithuanian Commonwealth. As for the reasons for this phenomenon, one should regard the development of parliamentarianism, which primarily increased the importance of parliamentary oratory: not only advisory speeches (*genus deliberativum*), but also ceremonial, i.e. epideictic speeches (*genus demonstrativum*), and their subsequent proliferation in the private sphere (Rynduch, 1967, p. 33; Bieńkowski, 1984, p. 214; Kotarski, 1990, pp. 183–184; Krzywy, 2014, p. 20, 46; Ciszewska, 2016, pp. 7–10).

By the beginning of the 17th century, most types of epideictic speeches had been known and practised in their dialogic form and adapted to the culture of the nobility. This meant that almost every type of oratory was paired with an answer. We do not know when this process began, nor what its course was, as the 16th-century sources are very scarce in this respect and there is no research, including comparative studies, conducted on this subject. The oldest known monument of

secular occasional oratory delivered in Polish, which dates back to 1576, is Jan Kochanowski's speech, in which he thanked those gathered at his brother's funeral. The next extant secular funeral speeches were created as late as the 17th century; their composition was now stabilised and, more importantly, their function was established and this would not change for another two centuries.

Secular funeral speeches stood out significantly among that section of the overall funeral oratory that Polish researchers have often referred to using the overarching terms: "funerary speeches" (Skwara, 2009; Sawa, 2014, pp. 167–168; Kuran, 2010; Kicińska, 2013a; 2013b; et al.) or "funeral panegyrics" (Danowska and Wojtowicz, 2013, pp. 523–524). Like sermons, the secular speeches constituted an official part of funerals (Danowska and Wojtowicz, 2013, p. 524) and were delivered in Polish, but differed from sermons mainly genetically, but also in terms of their purpose, composition, length, moment of delivery, the status of the speaker, and even the ways of circulating the texts. The sermon was a lecture on the Scripture, its aim being to instruct the faithful (Danowska and Wojtowicz, 2013, pp. 524–525), whereas the great majority of secular speeches were characterised by a dialogic form (speech – response), and their aim was to express sympathy to relatives (condolences) and, in response, gratitude to the gathered guests (Ciszewska, 2016, pp. 216–220; Barłowska and Ciszewska, 2019, p. 26).¹ Secular funerary speeches were also incomparably shorter than sermons and they were delivered at the gravesite (Chrościcki, 1974, p. 52), although on occasion (if the funeral was preceded by the transport of the body) as a special variety also earlier: while the remains were being moved out and at subsequent stops of the procession (Barłowska, 2010–2011; Jarczykova, 2012, p. 72, 75–76; Manyś, 2014, p. 165; Ciszewska, 2016, pp. 239–243). Finally, in contrast to sermons, it was extremely rare that these would be published as independent prints. If a record of such a speech was published, it occurred in a few reports and funerary diaries or oratory anthologies (Barłowska, 2010–2011, pp. 57–58). However, the most natural "environment" for the texts in question was the handwritten *silva rerum*

¹ The detailed rules of composing both these types of secular speeches, in view of the incompatibility of popular Western textbooks with the oratory culture of the Commonwealth nobility of the period, began to be codified by Old Polish rhetoricians in normative texts only in the fourth decade of the 17th century. The condolence on behalf of the guests was to have a tripartite structure, which required the speaker to express sorrow regarding the death (*exprimere dolorem super defuncto*) or undertake considerations of a mainly vanitative nature, praise the deceased (*laudare defunctum*), and comfort their relatives (*consolari amicos defuncti*) (Radau, 1661, p. 294; Ciszewska, 2016, p. 219). The speech in which the orator thanked people on behalf of the family consisted of four points, the first two corresponded to the exordial and laudatory part of the condolences, while the latter two required him to thank the guests (*gratiarum actio*) who attended the funeral ceremony, and to invite them to the funeral feast (*invitatio ad convivium funebre*) (Radau, 1661, p. 301; Ciszewska, 2016, p. 235).

and cartularies, in which the funeral speeches, as Maria Barłowska expressed: “overwhelm with their abundance” [“aż przytłaczają swą obfitością”] (2008, p. 11).

Among the most frequently copied texts of secular funerary speeches of the period are those by Jakub Sobieski (the elder),² an eminent speaker, primarily in the Sejm. While working with Barłowska on the first critical edition of Jakub Sobieski’s funerary speeches, we found 285 transcriptions of 27 speeches written in 69 manuscript codices and 6 prints (Sobieski, 2019, p. 165). This list is the most emphatic indication of the scale of interest enjoyed by his funerary speeches.

Of the twenty-seven surviving funeral speeches, five were delivered at women’s burials: Regina Żółkiewska, *née* Herbut, the wife of the Chancellor and Great Hetman of the Crown (thanks expressed in Zhovkva, possibly on 16 December 1626 – uncertain date; Sobieski, 2019, pp. 61–63 (VII)³), Anna Eufrozyna Sieniawska, *née* Chodkiewicz, the wife of the Great Crown Standard Bearer (thanks given in Lviv on 2 May 1633; Sobieski, 2019, pp. 90–92 (XIV)), Zofia Daniłowicz, *née* Żółkiewska, the wife of the Voivode of Ruthenia (thanks given in Zhovkva on 27 November 1634; Sobieski, 2019, pp. 98–99 (XVII)), Anna Ostrogska, *née* Kostka, the wife of the Voivode of Volhynia (thanks given in Jarosław on 7 January 1636; Sobieski, 2019, pp. 100–106 (XVIII)) and Barbara Ostrorogowa, *née* Górkow-Roszkowska, the wife of the Royal Cupbearer (condolences on behalf of guests delivered in Lviv on 13 May 1641; Sobieski, 2019, pp. 131–133 (XXIV)).⁴

After the introductions, which contained reflections on the instability of human happiness, the changeability of fate, the inevitability, cruelty and ruthlessness of

² Jakub Sobieski of the Janina coat of arms (born 5 May 1591, died 13 June 1646), Starosta of Krasnostaw (1624), Crown Carver (1628) and Cupbearer (1636), then Voivode of Belz Voivodeship (1638) and of Ruthenian Voivodeship (1641), and finally the Castellan of Krakow (1646), has already been the subject of numerous biographical studies, including two extensive monographs, covering both his political and oratory activity (*inter alios*: Długosz, 1988, 1999–2000; Trawicka, 2007; Barłowska and Ciszevska, 2019, pp. 7–22; Sobieski, 2019, pp. 429–430), so I will only provide some basic facts here. He was the son of Marek, Crown Court Standard Bearer, and Jadwiga, *née* Snopkowska. He received a very thorough education, first at the Zamoyski Academy, then at the Krakow Academy, and during his educational journey in 1607–1613, he visited almost all of Western Europe and studied under the supervision of Isaac Casaubon. He was very active publicly, first as a courtier, then as a deputy to the Sejm, as well as the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, and finally a Senator. He took part in the wars with Moscow, Turkey, Sweden, and the Cossacks, and participated in the negotiations which resulted in the Truce of Dywilino (11 December 1618), the Treaty of Khotyn (9 October 1621), the Truce of Altmark (Stary Targ – in 1629), as well as the Treaty of Stuhmsdorf (Sztumska Wieś – in 1635). From his second marriage with Teofila Zofia Daniłowiczówna, two sons were born: Marek and Jan, who became the King of Poland, John III, in 1674.

³ The numbers of speeches (Roman numerals) and sentences (Arabic numerals) have been drawn from the critical edition: Sobieski, 2019.

⁴ All the biographical data together with bibliographical addresses can be found in the commentary to the edition in the section: *Objaśnienia* (Sobieski, 2019, pp. 429–554).

death, characteristic of funeral texts, Sobieski would praise the dead. The women at whose funerals Sobieski spoke were magnates and wives of high-ranked state dignitaries, Ostrogska even had the royal title of Princess, but due to the legal homogeneity of the nobility estate (there was no distinction of rank or division into *gentes*, which was frequent in Europe), their commendable virtues and achievements were those that corresponded to the noble ideal of a woman, i.e. the roles of wife, mother, and widow (Wyrobisz, 1992; Bogucka, 2005; Nowicka-Struska, 2006; Kicińska, 2013a; 2013b). In vain would one seek to accommodate in the aristocratic ethos of the 17th-century women's individual intellectual or political aspirations, as these – though obviously frequently realised (Targosz, 1997; Kupczewska, 2018; Partyka, 2004) – could not serve as the inventive basis for secular funeral encomia in the first half of the 17th century.

The oldest exhaustive description that I am aware of presenting an encomium in a secular funerary speech for a married or widowed noblewoman can be found in the manuscript of the Jagiellonian Library (ref. no. 6092), in a textbook entitled: *Orator Tullianus politicus seu Instructiones oratoriae Ciceronis oratori utriusque status nobili accommodatae anno Domini 1649*. This compendium was compiled, according to Eugenija Ulčīnaitė (1984, pp. 179–180), most probably between 1649 and 1654, at the College in Stanisławów, so it may have been almost a contemporary read for Sobieski. Since it has not been quoted with regard to the subject matter of the paper yet, I will take the liberty of quoting it in more detail. In the second part of the compendium entitled *De oratione politica*, after a general introduction on composing secular funeral speeches (Ciszewska, 2016, p. 221), in point seven, *De oratione dicenda in funere virginum et matronarum* (*Orator Tullianus*, ff. 135r–137v), we read that the deceased matron should be praised above all because of her faithful and exceptional love for her husband (*amorem constantem et singulari emerga maritum*), a theme that can be developed by citing various examples and sayings of famous people (*quod variis amplificare poterit exemplis et virorum illustrium dictis*). Secondly, what should be mentioned is the respectable upbringing of children (*laudabit honestam liberorum educationem*), as well as a love for God (*pietatem in Deum*), generosity towards the poor (*liberalitatem in egenos*), motherly gentleness towards her children (*clementiam maternam in subditos*) and prudence in guiding the family (*prudentiam in regenda familia*). The author also recommends the use of apostrophes addressed to the widowed husband, the remaining children, subjects, the poor (*ad pauperes turmas*), and residents of hospitals and monasteries (*ad xenodochia*), as well as *sermocinatio*, by introducing the figure of the deceased, addressing a farewell to all these groups (*quibus etiam omnibus valedicentem potest inducere defunctam*). Then, the author goes on to *de facto* identify the laudatory topos *e genere* with the topos *ex bonis fortunae* (Lausberg, 2002, pp. 137–139)

and recommends the praise due to external circumstances (fate) by describing the excellence of both the birth family of the deceased and her spouse (*Bona item fortunae recensabit, qualia precipue sunt splendor familiae ipsius, in qua nata est, et splendor familiae mariti*). He also adds that it is advisable to compare the deceased to other women of some marital virtue (*cum aliis faeminis aliqua virtute coniugali insignibus*). A similar procedure should be adopted if the deceased was a widow.

The status of a widow, being the closest to sanctity for it entailed the renunciation of the world, constituted the most respected female lay role model (Nowicka-Struska, 2006, p. 64; Kicińska, 2013a, p. 135). This sacrifice proves particularly significant in the context of the change in the legal situation of a widowed noblewoman, who after her husband's death actually enjoyed much greater freedom than unmarried or married women, as well as in terms of making financial decisions (Malinowska, 2008, p. 81, 83, 99; Bogucka, 2005, p. 99; Kicińska, 2013b, p. 164; 2013a, pp. 138–139). The rhetorician, probably not without the recognition of the above, lists as the most important virtues of the widow, those that are a testament to her renunciation of the benefits of widowhood, that is: restraint and prudence of the widow (*continentia et prudentia vidualis*), contempt for earthly matters (*contemptus rerum mundanarum*), perseverance in adversity (*constantia in rebus adversis*), and love extinguished together with the late husband (*amor cum extincto coniuge extinctus*).

The catalogue of women's moral virtues the secular speaker could fittingly mention was therefore quite modest and did not generally differ from the compilations developed on the basis of sermon texts already well recognised by researchers. Sobieski's speeches at women's funerals, except for the giving of thanks at Ostrogska's funeral (XVIII), were very short; thus, the laudatory sections had to be concise as well. There is no room here for extensive genealogical discussions with detailed facts from the lives of the most illustrious ancestors, and the *e genere* praise is more of a metaphorical than a chronicle-related nature (VII, 13; XVII, 5, 9). Above all, the speaker praises the deceased for the moral virtues and positive character traits that ought to adorn a wife, a mother, and a widow. Dominating among the mentioned *bona animi* are the virtues, understood broadly as an established ethical disposition (XIV, 11), piety (XIV, 11), modesty, appropriateness of behaviour and customs (XXIV, 10–11), courtesy and kindness (XVII, 6), prudence (VII, 12; XVII, 6), faithfulness in love, and diligence and care for her husband (VII, 23; XXIV, 10–11), as well as consistency in the face of adversity (XXIV, 15; XXVI, 6), reason, greatness of heart and strength of spirit (VII, 12; XVII, 6); however, not all these virtues were mentioned in every speech. Sobieski reinterpreted the latter features listed here in his speeches at the funerals of Żółkiewska and Daniłowiczowa and presented them as valour (*fortitudo*). He called both matrons "valiant" and described them with paraphrases of words drawn from the biblical Book of Proverbs

(*Mulierem fortem quis inveniet? Longe est ab ultimis finibus pretium eius*; 31:10). This allowed him not only to create an image of the *matronaledecus* – female ornaments (XVII, 7) and a role model for other women, but also a model worthy of imitation by men (VII, 18; XVII, 8).

Women's encomia in Sobieski's speeches do not resemble chronicles, they do not report the merits (*merita*) and deeds (*facta, res gestae*), as men's praises – narrative in character – often do. This is probably because a woman could demonstrate the merits that would receive the highest recognition from her own family and husband, her homeland and the Church primarily as a mother of numerous offspring, birthing the defenders of the Commonwealth and the faith (VII, 21; XXIV, 15). Referring to the pious foundations of Anna Eufrozyna Sieniawska (he generally refers to these in Latin as: "*pia et sancta opera*" XIV, 13), Sobieski resorts to apophasis (*praeteritio*). He could enrich this information with the details of Sieniawska's rich donations to Dominican and Carmelite monasteries (Sobieski, 2019, p. 495), since such offerings belonged to the few works (*facta*) that were included in the Old Polish female role model, but he limited himself to an allusion to the evangelical precept to keep almsgiving secret (Matt 6:3–4) and left the subject without elaboration.

Speakers often filled the empty place of the *topos* of praise for glorious deeds with comparisons (*comparatio*) or exemplars recalling mythical and historical (Roman and biblical) heroines. Such exemplars constituted the standard element of both Old Polish secular speeches and sermons delivered at widows' funerals (Kicińska, 2013b, p. 130, 135). A somewhat similar mechanism functioned in the secular speeches delivered at ceremonies of ordination – which could include a comparison to Judith or the Amazon as a supposed description of the spiritual struggle and triumph of the candidate for the convent over the world and temporality (Trębska, 2011). However, all this occurred at the level of fiction; hence, it adds significance to the solution that Sobieski adopted when comparing Żółkiewska to the legendary Kleia (*Cloelia* – the Roman woman who, fleeing from Etruscan captivity, swam across the Tiber) and Cornelia (*Cornelia Minor*) who is the model of the Roman matron (VII, 15–16). This *comparatio* was only intended as an introduction to a short *narratio*, comprising only a few sentences. In it, Sobieski described the behaviour of the Chancellor's wife at a specific historical moment, dramatically confronted with a macabre reality – at the moment of receiving her husband's body and a letter from her son. Let us remember that Stanisław Żółkiewski, Chancellor and Hetman, was killed in the Battle at Cecora (1620) against the Ottomans, his head was severed from the body and for two years impaled on a pike at the entrance to the sultan's palace in Constantinople. His death shocked public opinion and became a permanent part of Polish history as a symbol of heroism and sacrifice. Meanwhile, the son, taken captive in the same battle, died shortly after his return

to Poland. Regina Żółkiewska had to arrange two funerals – first, in 1621, she buried her husband’s headless body, then in 1623 her son and the recovered head of her husband.

In Żółkiewska’s encomium, Sobieski first outlines the circumstances: here are the delivered Hetman’s body and a letter from her son, begging her for ransom to buy him out from captivity; he then presents the widow’s mental reaction. He does this by accumulating verb forms, mostly in the negative: misfortune did not frighten her, it did not lead to despair, it did not lead to crying typical of women (Sobieski uses a Polish noun here: *kwilenie*, which most frequently means a child’s mewling cries), she did not show any symptoms of a breakdown and she endured the blow valiantly (VII, 19–21). In this way, by reporting the facts and behaviour, and thus giving these few sentences a characteristic feature of a male encomium, Sobieski added value to the steadfastness and strength of Regina Żółkiewska’s spirit.

The longest of all the speeches for women was delivered by Sobieski at the funeral of Anna Ostrogska, *née* Kostka (XVIII). Not only did he list all the applicable female virtues and merits, but he added some male ones, including... the gift of speechmaking. Praise from the origin (*e genere*), opening the laudatory part, in terms of amplification resembles extensive wedding encomia. Sobieski presents her ancestors on the spear side – the father, and on the distaff side – the mother and grandmother, the Duchess of Mazovia, with excellent dynastic connections (XVIII, 7). A separate category, which connects the maternal and paternal families, consists of the figures of Saint Jacek Odrowąż (Hyacinth of Poland) and Stanislaus Kostka (still Blessed at the time), to whom the speaker devoted separate passages as the relatives of the deceased (XVIII, 8–10). Then, in keeping with the chronology, the orator takes up the subject of her marriage to Prince Alexander Ostrogski (XVIII, 11–13), followed by extensive praise *ex liberis*, consisting of encomia of her sons on account of the hopes invested in them, though never fulfilled due to their premature deaths (XVIII, 16–20), and her daughters, or rather their husbands and families, and eventually their grandchildren (XVIII, 22–29). Praise for the Princess’ personal virtues lies primarily in three adjacent sentences, which, as is usually the case with Sobieski, represent enumerations corresponding to three different categories. As the first, Sobieski presents her works of charity and devotional practices (and thus *facta*): pious deeds, fervent prayers, rich foundations, generous alms, and severe mortifications (XVIII, 40). In the second sentence, he enumerates, without even pausing, one after another, the virtues he considers worthy of imitation by men: the grandeur of her spirit, valiant constancy of character, particular prudence and oratory skills, as well as courtesy and kindness (XVIII, 41). Finally, the third *congeries* brings the typically feminine virtues of shame, piety, modesty, caution in raising children, and a cheerful – that is serene – conscience (XVIII, 42).

As we can see, the previously presented sparing praise cannot compare with Ostrogska's family and individual laudations, both in terms of length and number of enumerated virtues, merits, and pious deeds. Sobieski added not two or three, but an entire set of male qualities to the typically female repertoire, including oratory skills, an astonishing development considering that in the country where rhetoric was the most important of sciences, women generally did not speak in ceremonial situations. To this let us add the composition of the speech subordinated to the theme of the intertwining of the joys and sorrows of the deceased, thus bringing her "feelings" to the fore. Let us add the fictitious statement by Ostrogska, quoted in her sons' praise, in which the mother expresses her hopes for the future of her offspring (XVIII, 17) – do these changes, both quantitative and qualitative, amount to a change in the female role model? Absolutely not, because Princess Ostrogska, honoured by Sobieski with such extensive praise, remains a figure inscribed in the tradition of her family of origin and the family she married into as a daughter, wife, and mother. She, as well as all the noblewomen praised by Sobieski, pursued the same female ideals.

The crucial matter here, however, is to recognise not the personal model, as it is basically unchangeable, but the methods of amplifying the laudatory *topoi* of women. The virtue of piety can simply be named, still a number of arguments can also be provided, with the enumeration of specific foundations and donations, describing in detail devotional practices and mortifications, etc., just as the preachers speaking at funerals did. Secular speakers rarely opted for that solution, preferring to rely on the knowledge of their audience. Sobieski, who in biographical laudations of men described in detail the *res gestae* of the deceased, was most often content to limit himself to the *enumeratio* of virtues, deprived of any exemplification of biographical facts in women's encomia. This was so common in the first half of the 17th century that one can say that the reflection of the author of the Roman inscription, which is a record of a funerary speech and is known as *Laudatio Murdiae* (CIL VI 10230 = ILS 8394), has not lost its relevance:

For these reasons praise for all good women is simple and similar, since their native goodness and the trust they have maintained do not require a diversity of words. Sufficient is the fact that they have all done the same good deeds with the fine reputation they deserve, and since it is hard to find new forms of praise for a woman, since their lives fluctuate with less diversity, by necessity we pay tribute to values they hold in common, so that nothing may be lost from fair precepts and harm what remains. (Fant and Lefkowitz, 2016, p. 28)

Sobieski was considered by his contemporaries to be a speaker worthy of imitation, not only because of the noble simplicity and clarity of his message, but also because he responsibly satisfied the needs and expectations of his listeners.

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