

The north-east citadel of Ioannina Castle as captured through the lenses of photographer Vasilis Koutsavelis, in the 1930s. Photograph from the Vasilis Koutsavelis family archive. Right, Ali Pasha in a colour lithograph of 1819 by L.Dupré





ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE

EPIRUS

IOANNINA CASTLE

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Above: Map depicting the site of the Castle.

- 1, 2 Aerial photographs of Ioannina Castle.
- 3 Ioannina Castle. Partial view of a tower from the ancient fortification.

INTRODUCTION

Ioannina Castle, with its timeless history, is an emblematic monument of the town by the same name. It is built on a small peninsula that juts into Lake Pamvotida (figs. 1, 2), surrounding the town's residential nucleus. The Castle is relatively well-preserved and shaped like an irregular trapezoid. The fortification enclosure, adapted to the terrain's irregularities, stands between 8.85 m and 13.69 m high today. Within the enclosure there are two fortified citadels: the first in the northeast, dominated by the mosque of Aslan Pasha, and the second in the southeast, known as Its Kale.

"Giannena first in arms, in piastres, and in letters."

This popular verse refers to Ioannina's modern history, especially during the era of the infamous Ali Pasha, when the town thrived in finance and culture. Yet, Ioannina had already been known since the Byzantine period, and recent excavations suggest its origin dates back to antiquity. Although only limited evidence exists, the town's initial settlement appears to have been located within the Castle area, built on a small rocky peninsula protruding into the lake and connected to the mainland by a narrow land strip (fig. 2). In earlier times, this strip was often flooded, hindering access but providing natural defense.

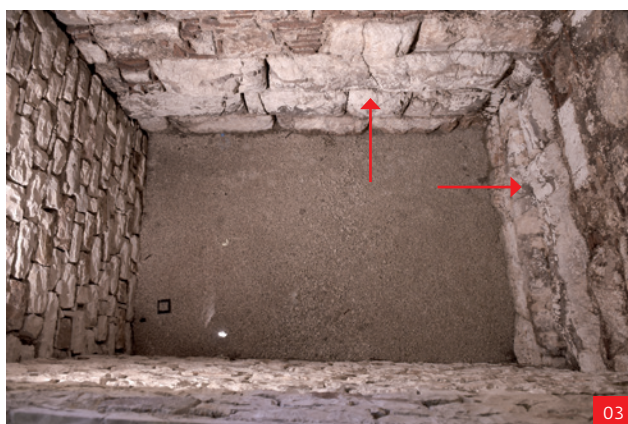
The ancient fortification

Ruins of buildings and incidental findings confirm the existence of an ancient settlement, the name of which remains unknown. Given its strategic and geomorphological position at the center of the basin, it is believed that this site may have been home to a significant city of the Molossian tribe—possibly even their capital, Passarona.

Excavations carried out on the southwest side of the Castle, near the main gate, uncovered part of a robust ancient wall and a tower (fig. 3). These structures were built using large stone blocks arranged in an irregular, ashlar diatonic system, suggesting the fortifications date back to the Late Classical or Hellenistic period. This dating is further supported by coins from the same era discovered within the wall's fill. Undoubtedly, this is a significant find that pushes the history of Ioannina several centuries further back into antiquity, challenging previously accepted theories and studies.

Although archaeological evidence remains limited, it appears that the ancient fortifications were concentrated primarily on the western and more exposed section of the peninsula. In contrast, the eastern part was naturally protected by steep and irregular terrain, making access from the lake side difficult.

Given the site's strategic importance and existing fortifications, it is highly probable that the settlement persisted into the Early Christian period, albeit reduced



in size and population. An earlier hypothesis suggested that, in the 6th century, Emperor Justinian fortified the peninsula and resettled there the population of Old Evroia—a city under threat from barbarian invasions. This theory is based on *De Aedificiis* (*On Buildings*) by the historian Procopius, who describes a fortified location that closely resembles the Castle of Ioannina.

However, despite earlier support, this theory must now be reconsidered, particularly in light of recent archaeological discoveries. It is also worth noting that no material remains from the time of Justinian have been found to date.

The Byzantine fortifications

The name of the town, along with its bishop Zacharias, is first mentioned in Byzantine sources in the 9th century.

The presence of a bishop implies a sizable population and, in accordance with the settlement patterns of the time, the existence of a fortified enclosure that ensured survival in this turbulent era. The Byzantine fortification wall was built atop the ancient one and largely follows its same course.

The earliest written reference to Ioannina's Byzantine fortifications appears in the *Alexiad* by Anna Komnene, which recounts events from the spring of 1082. According to her account, the Norman Bohemond, son of Robert Guiscard, captured the town of Ioannina. During his brief occupation, he repaired the walls, surrounded the town with a broad moat, and, judging that the existing citadel was inadequate, erected a second one.

The full extent of the Middle Byzantine fortifications remains unknown, and it is difficult to distinguish the



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modifications carried out by Bohemond. However, on the southeast side of the Castle, on a rocky hill, remains of a defensive wall and a notable circular tower—known as the Tower of Bohemond (figs. 5, 6; topographic diagram p. 132)—can still be seen.

According to many scholars, this tower originally belonged to the fortifications constructed under Norman rule, as did a second tower located nearby to the northeast. These two towers appear to have formed a quadrangular fortified structure covering an area of approximately 2.71 acres. This is likely the “very secure citadel” (*ερμυστάτη ακρόπολη*) referred to in historical sources and attributed to Bohemond, which was originally more impressive than its modern remains. If we accept the hypothesis that the fortification remains on the southeastern rocky outcrop represent Bohemond’s citadel, then the northeastern outcrop—today the site of the Aslan Pasha Mosque—must have been the original citadel of the Middle Byzantine fortification also mentioned in the *Alexiad*.





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- 4 Silver "Trachy(Rough)" coin of the "despot" of Epirus, Michael I Komnenos Doukas, son of Michael II, Numismatic Museum of Athens.
- 5 Tower of Bohemond.
- 6 Topographic diagram of Ioannina Castle (the Byzantine fortification is marked in red).
- 7 Gallery, north of the Castle's Main Gate. The masonry of the Byzantine fortification phase is visible.

In the early 13th century, Ioannina came under the control of the Komnenoi Doukai, rulers of the State of Epirus, later known as the Despotate of Epirus after the title "despot" held by most of its sovereigns. In the early 13th-century document «Σημείωμα περί οικίσεως τόπου», Michael I Komnenos Doukas, the Despotate's first ruler (1205–1215), is described as «ὡς τεκηνάμενος τοῦ τῶν Ἰωαννίνων πολίδιον καὶ εἰς μόρφωσιν κάστρου αὐτό ἀνεγείρας» (fig. 4). Based on this, earlier scholars—lacking access to more recent archaeological findings—attributed the construction of Ioannina's fortifications to Michael I.

According to historical sources, Michael I resettled a number of refugees from Constantinople in Ioannina, including members of the Filanthropinoi and Strategopouloi families. These families became well known for founding the monasteries bearing their names on the Island of Lake Pamvotis.

Much of the Byzantine fortification of Ioannina is still visible in today's Castle, likely preserved in the form shaped by major construction efforts in the 13th century and further additions or improvements made during the 14th century. These fortifications followed the natural morphology of the terrain, as did their earlier construction phases. The defensive enclosure, already present since the Middle Byzantine period, survives in several sections of the current Castle, forming part of its inner walls. The original outer side is still visible in the galleries embedded in the Late Ottoman-era wall (fig. 7).

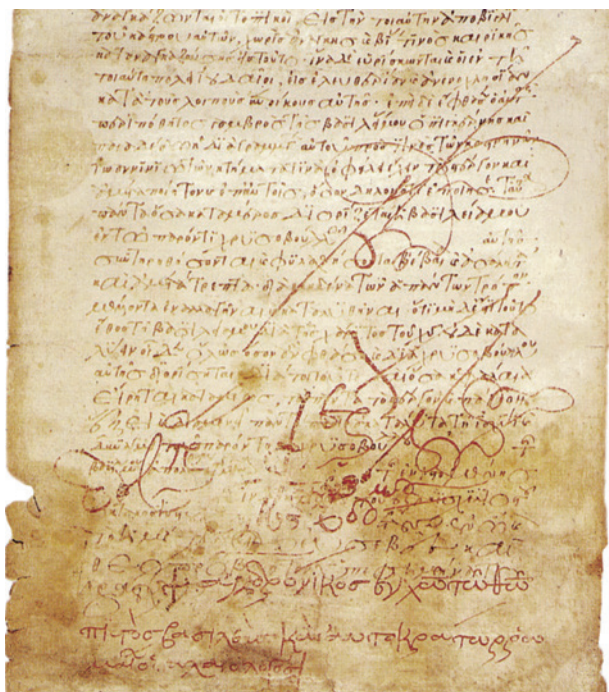
In areas susceptible to attack due to flat terrain, the Byzantine walls were reinforced with various types of towers. Many of these survive today, while others have been uncovered during recent excavations. A water-filled moat, mentioned in the *Chronicle of Morea*, surrounded the wall on the western side, with access to the Castle via a drawbridge.

This moat effectively isolated the Castle from the mainland, giving it the appearance of an islet. The fortifications became nearly impregnable, especially when heavy rains caused the lake to rise and flood the surrounding areas and neighborhoods.

The citadels

The two rocky outcrops enclosed within the fortifications of Ioannina Castle, located on the eastern side and bordered by a steep slope, had already been transformed into citadels during the Middle Byzantine period. In earlier times, these elevations were more prominent and visually striking, though over the centuries they became less distinct due to the surrounding construction and gradual infilling, which smoothed access to them.

The northeastern hill covers an area of approximately 1482 acres and rises 23 meters above the surface of the lake—referred to in Byzantine sources as *Μέγας Οζερός*



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(Great Lake). Fourteenth-century sources, such as the *Chronicle of Ioannina*, mention this citadel as *Επάνω Γουλάς* (Upper Tower), which served as the residence of local rulers. The citadel's strategic defensibility offered protection to the ruling elite, not only against external threats but also in the event of internal unrest.

It is believed that during the 13th century, the residences of the Ioannina nobility were built on the slopes of the southeastern citadel (fig. 11), where there was more space and easier access. The Church of the Archangel Michael and the Church of Christ Pantokrator most likely stood on the site where the Fethiye Mosque is located today.

In the early 14th century, the residents of the Castle of Ioannina managed to free themselves from the authority of the Despotate of Epirus and its capital, Arta. Within a year, they transferred control of the town to the Byzantine emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, securing a series of privileges, later confirmed by two *chrysobulls* (gold-sealed imperial decrees) issued in 1319 and 1321 (fig. 8). These privileges applied to all the town's inhabitants—both nobles and the *koino* (the common people), as referred to in the *Tocco Chronicle*, a 14th-century verse narrative. The citizens of Ioannina were exempted from several taxes and obligations, such as the *commercion* (a tax on trade), the *mitaton* (the governor's right to requisition goods for the army), as well as the *apovigliasi*, *viglatiko*, *limnaion pakton*, *melissoennomion*, and the *opsonion* (a range of duties tied to the lake's resources). In exchange, they were required to contribute to the "care, maintenance, and restoration" (*επιμέλεια, περιποίηση και ανάκτισις*) of their castle.

Despite being an inland town far from seaports and major trade centers, Ioannina experienced a period of significant prosperity during the 13th and 14th centuries. The town maintained strong ties with Venice, as evidenced by written records and the discovery of Venetian ducat hoards in the region. Ioannina exported livestock and imported textiles and other luxury goods. The abundance of both Venetian and Byzantine coin hoards testifies to the town's commercial vitality and its integration into wider trade networks within the Byzantine Empire.

During this period, the island on Lake Pamvotis emerged as an important monastic center. The renowned monasteries established there were founded by members of prominent Byzantine families, such as the Filanthropinoi and Strategopouloi, and were primarily dedicated to Saint Nicholas.

Historical sources from the time describe the Castle as impregnable. The *chrysobull* of 1319 asserts that Ioannina stood out in size, strategic location, and defensibility: "μεγέθει μιν ... των πολλών διαφέρων· θέσεως δε ευκαιρία και κράτει μάλιστα και ερμυνότητι πολλώ δη πλείονων διαφέρων." The *Tocco Chronicle* echoes this sentiment, describing Ioannina as "the most beautiful and strongest by far", the "savior and ark"

- 8 The golden bull of Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, 1319. National Library of Greece, Athens.
- 9 Detail of icon depicting the Incredulity of St Thomas. Great Meteoron Monastery, prior to 1384. Depicted behind Thomas is the donor Maria Angelina Doukaina Palaiologina, wife of Thomas Preljubovic, ruler of Ioannina.
- 10 Island of Ioannina. Strategopoulou Monastery (13th century).



(σώτεια κιβωτός) of its people—“μεμέστωται οικητόρων” (“full of inhabitants”). According to the same sources, the Castle contained 21 churches and 7 monasteries, though only the ruins of a Byzantine bathhouse remain today.

In the mid-14th century, the residents of Ioannina surrendered the town to the Serbs, then the dominant power in the Balkans. They managed, however, to retain all the privileges granted to them by the Byzantine emperor. The Serbs appointed Thomas Preljubović as ruler of Ioannina—a controversial figure in the historical record—who succeeded in defending the Castle and the surrounding region against Albanian expansion, particularly after the Albanians had captured Arta. Preljubović, known as the “Slayer of Albanians,” and his wife Maria Angelina Palaiologina played significant roles in the political and cultural life of Epirus during this period (fig. 9).

In 1430, Ioannina surrendered by agreement to the Ottomans, who had already taken Thessaloniki and much of Macedonia and Thrace. Under the terms negotiated by Sinan Pasha—named after Sultan Murad’s general—the citizens of Ioannina preserved the privileges granted to them by the Byzantine and Serbian authorities. One of the conditions explicitly stated that the Ottomans were not to build even a small mosque (*mescit*) within the Castle.

This arrangement remained in effect until 1611, when an uprising led by Dionysios Philosophos (also known as Skylosophos), bishop of Trikke and Stagon, resulted in the expulsion of all Christian residents from the Castle. Many resettled in neighborhoods outside the town, while others fled to Western European cities, founding expatriate communities that would flourish in the centuries that followed.

From that point onward, the Castle was inhabited exclusively by Muslims and Jews. Mosques and Turkish baths were constructed, while Christian churches and Byzantine monasteries gradually disappeared.

The castle during the Ottoman Period

The present appearance of Ioannina Castle is largely the result of extensive renovations carried out in the early 19th century under the direction of Ali Pasha. These works were completed in 1815. The layout of the Ottoman fortifications generally coincides with that of the earlier Byzantine walls, many of which were preserved and incorporated into the new structures.

On the more vulnerable western side, a robust outer wall was constructed (fig. 16), running parallel to the Byzantine wall. The space between the two was bridged by a series of vaulted chambers, which served as barracks. Additional reinforcements were added in the form of three large bastions: one in the Skala area (fig. 17), a second near the Main Gate, and a third in the Molos area. A broad wall walk was also built atop the fortifications, enabling easier





11 The South-East Citadel
(Its Kale).





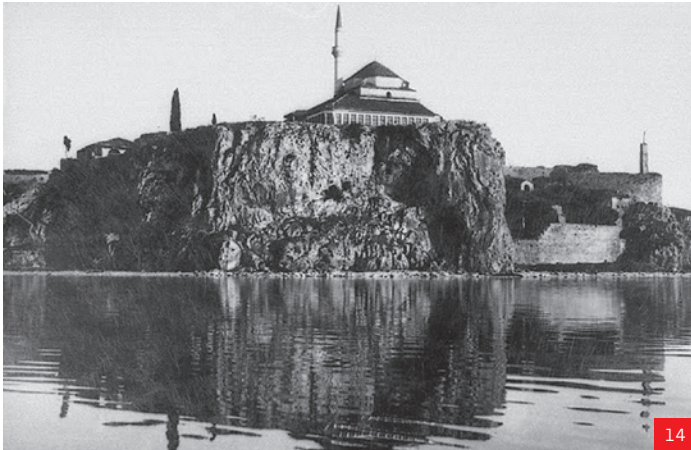
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- 12 View of Castle from the Island. The two citadels can be seen. Copperplate engraving from the book by Th. S. Hughes, *Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania*, London 1820.
- 13 Ali Pasha of Ioannina, during a hunt on Lake Butrint, March 1819. By Louis Dupré.
- 14 The North-East Citadel and the Aslan Pasha Mosque. Archive photograph, early 20th century.
- 15 Copperplate etching of the Castle of Ioannina. Drawing by W. Leitch and etching by J. Cousen. Based on the work by T. Allom created in 1843. The two Castle citadels can be seen, as well as Ali Pasha's Saray and the mosques.



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movement for soldiers and improving the Castle's defensive capacity.

The wall maintained a straight alignment from north of the Main Gate to the Molos bastion. Its inner face was formed by the preserved Byzantine wall, which had undergone multiple repairs and received Ottoman height extensions. Within the width of the fortification, a long vaulted space was created, divided into 34 rectangular chambers of varying sizes, now connected by arched openings.

The southern side of the fortification was also reinforced during the time of Ali Pasha, with the exception of a section near the southern bastion of *Its Kale*, where part of the original Byzantine wall was retained. Two substantial stone flanks were built and filled from within, with a wide wall walk constructed on top. Along the inner side of the southern wall, 40 single-room chambers were erected, most of which had been buried under backfill and were uncovered during recent restoration work.

The citadels

During the Ottoman period, both citadels within the Castle (figs. 12, 15) were preserved. The northeastern citadel (fig. 14) was transformed into a religious center following the construction of the Aslan Pasha Mosque in 1618, named after the then-governor of Ioannina.

The southeastern citadel, known as *Its Kale* (fig. 31), was once again fortified and expanded to house and protect the *Saray* (palace) complex of Ali Pasha, which served as the administrative seat of the Pashalik of Ioannina.

Its Kale was constructed after the completion of the outer fortifications and functioned as an independent fortress spanning approximately 9 acres. It was designed as the final refuge for the town's defenders in the event of enemy attack. The fortress was reinforced by four bastions of varying shapes: two on the northern side, one on the northwest, and a fourth polygonal bastion located on the southwestern edge, where *Its Kale* meets the main southern wall of the Castle. The most prominent of these bastions is the western one, composed of two levels with a row of vaulted chambers, likely used for storing military equipment.

The *Saray* complex was prominently situated, and it has been described in numerous travelers' accounts and engravings. Alongside the palace, Ali Pasha also repaired the Fethiye Mosque and several military barracks—some of which survive to this day.

The castle in Modern Times

Throughout the 19th century, the Castle remained the heart of Ioannina, although urban development had begun to extend beyond the walls several centuries earlier. Despite undergoing numerous repairs and "renovations" to



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adapt to evolving military technologies and firearm use, the Castle had started to lose its strategic and administrative significance.

In 1913, following the liberation of Ioannina, the Castle was surrendered to the Greek army, which remained stationed in various parts of it until 1978. That year, its Kale and a number of associated buildings were transferred to the Ministry of Culture. Restoration and stabilization efforts began soon after, including the removal of modern structures and unearthing of buried architectural features. Between 2006 and 2014, significant conservation work was carried out. This included reinforcing the perimeter walls and galleries, restoring the upper parts of the fortifications, and conducting numerous archaeological excavations. Today, the Castle—especially its Kale—functions as a well-organized archaeological site and remains a major attraction for visitors.

THE MONUMENTS

1.– Main Gate

The main gate of Ioannina Castle is located roughly at the midpoint of the western side of the fortification (fig. 18), and it is possible that a similar gate existed in the Byzantine period at or near the same location. The gate lies along the axis of the town's central arterial road, a route believed to have remained unchanged since Byzantine times. It was protected by the adjacent west bastion, the northern section of which was elevated—probably in 1314 (1896)—and later became the Clock Tower (fig. 20).

- 16 View of the Ottoman walls (west side).
- 17 The "Skala" Bastion.
- 18 Main Gate of the Castle (inner side).



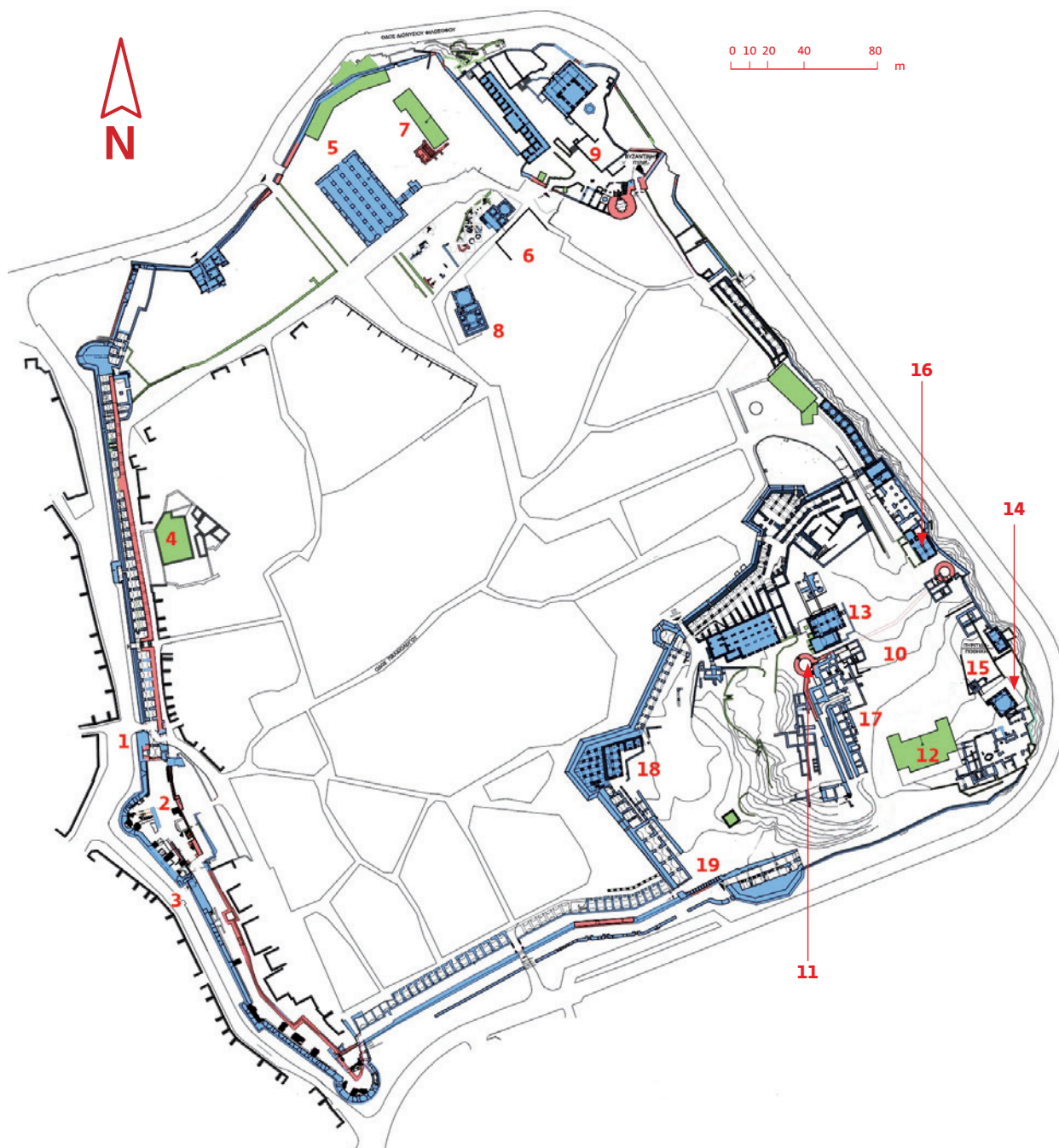
Externally, the gate features a prominent double arch composed of finely carved stone. On either side of the arch, two relief sculptures shaped like animals are embedded in the masonry. At the center of the larger arch, which surmounts the smaller one, there is an Arabic inscription carved into the wall. This inscription bears the date 1259 AH (1843 CE) and names Osman Nuri Pasha, likely responsible for the gate's restoration.

Historical accounts suggest that the Main Gate originally functioned as a drawbridge spanning the moat that once surrounded the Castle. The gate structure comprises two nearly square chambers, positioned parallel to one another and built into the thickness of the fortification wall. Beam sockets found near the bases of the vaults suggest the presence of a wooden floor, indicating that the gate likely had two storeys.

Upon entering the Castle, on the left-hand side, is the entrance to a vaulted gallery now functioning as an exhibition space. A permanent photographic exhibition titled "*Ioannina: From Byzantine Fortress Town to Ottoman Metropolis*" presents key moments in the town's historical evolution (fig. 19). In some of the gallery's rooms (fig. 21), visitors can also trace the construction phases of the ancient and Byzantine fortifications.

2.- "Tower" of Thomas

One of the most prominent and recognizable structures within the Castle is the so-called "Tower" of Thomas, located a short distance to the right of the present-day main gate (fig. 22). The structure extends inward



BYZANTINE PERIOD

OTTOMAN PERIOD

MODERN MONUMENTS

Topographic diagram
of Ioannina Castle.

- | | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|----|--|
| 1 | Main Gate | 11 | Tower of Bohemond |
| 2 | "Tower" of Thomas | 12 | Byzantine Museum |
| 3 | Gate on Ethnikis Antistaseos St. | 13 | "Treasury" |
| 4 | Synagogue | 14 | Fethiye Mosque |
| 5 | Sufari Saray | 15 | Tomb of Ali Pasha |
| 6 | Turkish Library | 16 | Building of the old Ottoman Kitchens |
| 7 | Byzantine Baths | 17 | Ruins of the Ali Pasha Palace (Saray) |
| 8 | Turkish Baths (Hamam) | 18 | The Silversmithing Museum |
| 9 | North-East Citadel | 19 | South Gat |
| 10 | South-East Citadel | | |



- 19 View of the photography exhibition in the Castle galleries.
- 20 View both of the bastion that protected the Main Gate and the Clock tower (addition of 1843).
- 21 Part of the Castle's old door, after its conservation.

from the wall and was added at a later date. Its facade features a large arched brick opening, and to its left are remnants of a brick inscription bearing the name ΘΩΜΑΣ (Thomas).

The building is traditionally attributed to Thomas Preljubović, the Serbian ruler of Ioannina from 1367 to 1384. During his rule, Preljubović undertook efforts to strengthen and restore the Castle in order to defend the town against the territorial ambitions of the Albanians, who had, by that time, seized much of the Despotate of Epirus.

Despite being commonly referred to as a “tower,” architectural analysis suggests that the structure was more likely part of the main gate of the town’s Byzantine fortifications. However, due to the lack of sufficient archaeological evidence, the exact form and function of the original structure remain uncertain.

3.– Gate on Ethnikis Antistaseos St.

This gate is located on the southern side of the west bastion, relatively close to the Main Gate, which it



resembles in both structure and appearance. It features a curved form, with stone reliefs positioned on either side and an arch above.

The gate consists of three chambers embedded within the thickness of the wall and arranged in an L-shaped configuration. Like the Main Gate, it is two-storeyed. Evidence of a wooden structure and beam sockets indicate the likely existence of a wooden floor between the levels. Access to the upper storey was provided by a small staircase leading up from the wall walk.

4.– **Synagogue**

Located a short distance from the Castle's main gate, this building is known as Kahal Kadosh Yashan (also spelled *Kahal Kantoss Giassan*), meaning the *Old or Inner Synagogue*. It is a large structure featuring a pillared hall. At its eastern end is the Hekhal—a marble alcove housing the Torah scrolls. The parokhet, a decorative embroidered curtain, traditionally covers the ark.

The synagogue's current architectural form dates to 1829. However, the presence of a Jewish community in Ioannina can be traced back to at least the Byzantine period. This is confirmed by references in a *chrysobull* (imperial decree) issued by Emperor Andronikos II Palaiologos, which acknowledges the existence and legal rights of the Jewish population in the town.

5.– **Sufari Saray**

The Sufari Saray (fig. 23) is a significant structure from the late Ottoman period and is believed to have served as a cavalry school or barracks during the time of Ali Pasha. Architecturally, it is an imposing stone building, characterized by a vaulted ground floor.

Today, following restoration by the Ministry of Education, the building houses the Historical Archives of Ioannina, serving as a valuable cultural and administrative resource.

6.– **Turkish Library**

Situated at the base of the northeastern citadel, the Turkish Library was likely connected to the madrasa (Islamic theological school) associated with the Aslan Pasha Mosque complex. The structure consists of a large central vaulted hall flanked by two smaller vaulted rooms (fig. 24).

Its façade features a portico supported by columns, accessible via a stone staircase. Due to its deteriorated condition, the library was one of the first buildings in the Castle to undergo restoration by the Archaeological Service.

7.– **Byzantine Baths**

Located in the courtyard of the 9th Primary School,



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- 22 "Tower" of Thomas.
- 23 View of the Sufari Saray.
- 24 Turkish Library.

the Byzantine Baths came to light during excavations carried out in the 1980s. It is a rare surviving structure from the Byzantine period within Ioannina Castle and holds significant historical value. The building was constructed on the foundations of an earlier ancient structure, part of which—specifically a section of its hypocaust (underfloor heating) system—has been preserved.

8.– Turkish Baths (Hamam)

Situated near the Byzantine Baths, this hamam dates from the early 17th century and is one of the most architecturally significant Ottoman structures in the Castle. Unfortunately, it has not undergone restoration and currently faces serious structural challenges, especially concerning the stability of its domes.

The baths comprise a large central hall, an intermediate vaulted chamber, the main bathing room, a vaulted water reservoir, and a hypocaust system for heating water—highlighting the advanced engineering of Ottoman-era public baths.

9.– North-East Citadel

The northeastern citadel dates back to the Middle Byzantine period, with portions of its original fortification walls still visible. It is identified in medieval



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- 25 Aslan Pasha Mosque.
- 26 Madrasa.
- 27 View of interior of the Aslan Pasha Mosque.
- 28 Turbe (tomb) of Aslan Pasha.
- 29 Decoration on the dome of the Turbe (tomb)
- 30 Detail of the decoration.



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31 Its Kale (South-East Citadel).

32 Byzantine Museum.

sources as the *Epano Goula* and is thought to have housed the palaces of Ioannina's rulers during various periods.

Today, most of the citadel is occupied by the Aslan Pasha Mosque complex (figs. 15, 25), constructed in 1618. The mosque is an outstanding example of early 17th-century Ottoman architecture, notable for its elegant reliefs and inscriptions, especially those adorning the central dome (fig. 27). A wide portico encircles the structure on three sides, enclosing a smaller colonnaded gallery.

The mosque complex functioned as a *küllîye*—a religious and cultural center that met both the spiritual and educational needs of Ioannina's Muslim population. It included a *madrassa* (seminary) (fig. 26), and was also active in charitable endeavors.

Adjacent to the mosque is the *türbe* (tomb) of Aslan Pasha (fig. 28), an octagonal, domed structure whose interior is decorated with intricate floral motifs (figs. 29, 30).

10.— South-East Citadel

The Its Kale—meaning “Inner Castle”—acquired its current form during the rule of Ali Pasha in the early 19th century (figs. 11, 15, 31). This inner stronghold enclosed the Saray (palace) of Ali Pasha and a number of additional buildings, many of which have been preserved and repurposed.

A smaller portion of the citadel, located on its southwest side, had already been fortified in the Middle Byzantine period. This area includes the notable Bohemond Tower, a structure from the time of Norman occupation. According to 14th-century sources, the Churches of the Taxiarches and Christ Pantokrator were also situated within the southeastern citadel.

Today, Its Kale is an organized archaeological site that draws a significant number of visitors. Many cultural and educational activities take place in its restored buildings, which are integral to the Castle's historical and architectural legacy.

11.— Tower of Bohemond

The Tower of Bohemond (fig. 5) stands near the center of the southeastern citadel, close to the later Church of the Aghioi Anargyroi. It is constructed from finely cut rectangular or square limestone blocks—likely repurposed from the earlier Hellenistic fortifications—with minimal use of mortar and only a few bricks.

The surviving tower rises to approximately 13 meters and features masonry walls 2.10 meters thick. Its interior reaches a maximum diameter of 6.97 meters. The structure consists of two floors. Today, the ground floor is mostly backfilled, while the upper and larger



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storey is covered by a broad dome. Entry is gained through an arched doorway facing south, though this opening is a later addition, created during repair work on that side of the tower.

Light enters the upper level through windows that are arched on the inside and rectangular on the exterior. Originally, the tower had more openings, some of which were subsequently sealed. An internal arched passage leads to a small vaulted room that once connected the tower to another building, later incorporated into Ali Pasha's Saray.

Another circular tower once stood to the northeast. Together with the existing tower and a connecting wall, they formed a four-sided fortification identified as the citadel built by Norman Bohemond, who occupied Ioannina in 1082.

12.– *Byzantine Museum*

This museum, constructed in the 1950s (figs. 11, 32), was originally built by the Greek Army as a royal pavilion on the site of Ali Pasha's palace. It now houses a rich collection of artifacts ranging from the Early Christian period to the 19th century, sourced from churches, monasteries, and excavation sites across Epirus.

Among its most significant exhibits are two ceramic icons in relief from the Byzantine church of Saint Basil in Arta, medieval numismatic "treasures" discovered across Epirus, marble capitals from the temple at Glyke in Thesprotia, and several post-Byzantine icons.

13.– *"Treasury"*

Commonly referred to as the "Treasury"—a name

33 "Treasury".

34 Fethiye Mosque and
Tomb of Ali Pasha.





preserved through oral tradition—this building is part of the Byzantine Museum complex. It was constructed in the late Ottoman period (fig. 33), likely as part of a larger complex that included Ali Pasha's Saray. Following its restoration, the building now houses a collection of silversmith works, an artisanal craft that flourished in Ioannina and the surrounding region. The exhibition highlights the city's rich tradition in metal artistry.

14.– *Fethiye Mosque*

The Fethiye Mosque was part of Ali Pasha's Saray complex (figs. 11, 34). According to local tradition, it was built on the site of a former Byzantine church. The mosque has undergone restoration, and its interior wall paintings—particularly those in the dome—have been conserved.

It now serves as an additional exhibition space. The current display, located in the galleries flanking the entrance, focuses on Ioannina during the Late Ottoman period. Exhibits include historical prints, written accounts, and materials illustrating the life and rule of Ali Pasha in Epirus.

15.– *Ali Pasha's Tomb*

Located near the entrance of the Fethiye Mosque, the tomb of Ali Pasha is enclosed by an elaborate iron railing—a reproduction of the original (fig. 34). Beneath it lie two graves; one of them is believed to contain the headless body of Ali Pasha, who was assassinated on the Island of Lake Pamvotis in 1822.

16.– *Building of the Old Ottoman Kitchens*

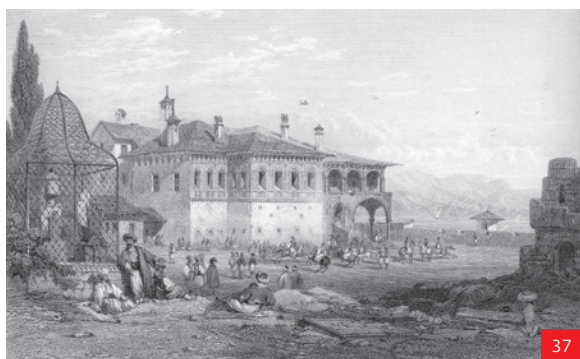
This structure, once used as the kitchens of the Ottoman complex, has been repurposed by the Archaeological Receipts Fund of the Ministry of Culture. It now functions as the Castle's cafeteria and has become a popular meeting spot for locals and visitors alike—particularly on sunny afternoons and quiet, romantic evenings.

17.– *Ruins of Ali Pasha's Palace (Saray)*

Excavations near the "Treasury" have revealed the ruins of Ali Pasha's Saray (figs. 11, 35). Although the remains are fragmentary and offer limited insight into the palace's original appearance, historical accounts by 19th-century travelers provide detailed and often admiring descriptions (fig. 37).

The western side of the Saray complex once incorporated the Bohemond Tower, while the Byzantine Museum, constructed in the mid-20th century, now occupies the area where the palace's southern wing once stood.





18.– *The Silversmithing Museum*

The Silversmithing Museum was inaugurated in September 2016 (fig. 38) and is housed within the west bastion of Its Kale, which was carefully restored and adapted for exhibition purposes. Inside the bastion's striking, columned halls, the long and distinguished history of silversmithing in Epirus is presented—a craft with deep roots extending back to Byzantine times. The museum showcases the artistry of Epirus' renowned silver craftsmen, whose exquisite creations are preserved in the sacristies of local monasteries and churches, as well as in prominent monastic centers such as Mount Athos and the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai.

The museum was established and is currently operated by the Cultural Foundation of the Piraeus Bank Group, which remains committed to the promotion and preservation of Epirus' cultural heritage.

19.– *South Gate*

The South Gate provides access to Its Kale and forms part of the southeastern citadel complex (fig. 36). It is located at the point where the southern bastion joins the southern flank of the Castle's perimeter wall. The gate comprises a narrow, cobbled passageway, approximately 45 meters long, with notable changes in elevation along its length. On the southern side of the passage, embedded within the bastion's thickness, are five small rooms that were historically used by the Castle's garrison. These chambers feature arched



38

35 Ruins of the Saray of Ali Pasha.

36 South Gate.

37 Saray of Ali Pasha and his tomb.
Steel engraving by W. Leitch and H.
Adlard, 1843.

38 The Silversmithing Museum.

doorways, arched windows, and closely spaced gun loops, highlighting their defensive function. From the exterior, the gate has a curved profile and is topped by a large stone arch. In earlier times, it bore a stone inscription on the wall above the entrance, bearing the date 1815, marking the period of its final construction or renovation under Ali Pasha.

NOTES

- ¹ On the Castle of Ioannina, see Βρανούσης 1968, Τσουρή 1983, p. 133 ff., and Παπαδοπούλου (ed.) 2009. Also Παπαδοπούλου 2015, p. 403 ff.
- ² In 1973, Julia Vokotopoulou (Βοκοτοπούλου 1973, σ. 95) was the first to suggest the existence of an ancient settlement within the Castle, following the discovery of a Roman-period marble head of the god Dionysus on the lake shore. Later, a marble funerary stele with two figures was found in the Castle's backfill. Excavations between the ruins of a monumental ancient structure near the Byzantine Baths. See also: Γκράτζιου 1983, p. 245 ff.; Ανδρέου 1986, p. 100; Γραβάνη 1994, pp. 35–55; Πλιάκου 2007, p. 143 ff.; Παπαδοπούλου 2009, p. 39 ff.
- ³ If this theory holds, the site would have been the birthplace in 373 B.C. of Myrtali—later known as Olympias, the mother of Alexander the Great. Historical sources report that Themistocles, condemned by Athens, fled to Passarona. It was there that Euripides taught his tragedy *Andromache*, a tribute to the Molossian tribe. King Pyrrhus also used Passarona to plan his campaign in Magna Graecia, responding to the Greek cities' call to resist Rome.
- ⁴ Excavations were supervised by the author between 2006 and 2009, during a European-funded restoration project. Among its

major findings were extensive segments of Byzantine walls and ancient fortifications—surprising results for the archaeological community.

- ⁵ The origins of Ioannina have long puzzled scholars. Since the early 19th century, chroniclers and historians attempted to date the town's founding using limited sources. They typically placed its origins in the Middle Byzantine period. In *The Chronicle of Epirus*, P. Aravantinos wrote that the Castle peninsula was settled by people from an ancient town on Kastritsa hill, destroyed by the Goths in 552. The survivors founded a new town on the peninsula, where a monastery to Aghios Ioannis Prodromos (Saint John the Baptist) preexisted. See Αραβαντινός 1856, p. 212 ff.
- ⁶ In the mid-20th century, Professor S. Dakaris, in his study *Ιωάννινα, η νεώτερη Εύροια* (Ioannina, the new Euroia), linked the town's founding to Emperor Justinian and his building campaigns (Δάκαρης 1952, p. 537 ff.). Though debated by many, the theory gained broad support, even being adopted by the Municipality of Ioannina, which included Justinian in its official seal.
- ⁷ Differing views have been expressed by other scholars: see Τριανταφυλλόπουλος 1990, p. 313; Κορδώσης 2003, p. 58 ff.; Παπαδοπούλου 2013, p. 131 ff.

- 8 The walls and towers were built primarily with large limestone blocks, which may have enabled Bohemond's engineers to complete construction within the few months of the siege, according to Anna Komnene.
- 9 It is likely that Michael I undertook a major reconstruction of Ioannina Castle in the early 13th century, possibly rebuilding parts of the Middle Byzantine fortifications.
- 10 The masonry consists of irregular rubble and small tile fragments set in both horizontal and vertical joints, denser in some sections.
- 11 Ενώ ἐνι Μέγας ο Οζερός το γύρωθεν του κάστρου. / Με το γεφύριον εμπαίνουσιν οι εκείσε κατοικῶντες.
- 12 Much of the moat survived into the Turkish period and the early 20th century, before being gradually backfilled. Two streets now occupy its place: K. Karamanlis Street and Ethnikis Antistaseos Street.
- 13 The Jewish residents of Ioannina enjoyed the same privileges mentioned in the chrysobulls. Their numbers were significant enough to constitute an important economic force, hence their inclusion in both imperial decrees.
- 14 Παπαδοπούλου 2009, pp. 207–215.
- 15 The monasteries established by Thomas and Maria Angelina, along with their votive offerings, reflect Ioannina's cultural sophistication, artistic influences, and the spiritual concerns of its people.
- 16 Παπασταύρου 2013.
- 17 On Ottoman fortifications of the Castle, see Παπαδοπούλου 2015, p. 406 ff.
- 18 See Παπαδοπούλου 2009; the inside cover includes a topographic diagram showing all construction phases of Ioannina Castle.
- 19 Παπαδοπούλου 2015, p. 413, fig. 5.
- 20 Ibid., p. 419, fig. 11.
- 21 The first date refers to the Islamic calendar (AH), the second to the Gregorian calendar (CE).
- 22 On inscriptions in the Castle, see Σούλης 1933, p. 92 ff.; Στεριάδη 2009, p. 111 ff.
- 23 An alternative theory links the inscription on the tower to Thomas Komnenos Doukas, ruler of the Despotate of Epirus between ca. 1296 and 1318. During a siege of Arta, he is thought to have taken refuge in Ioannina (ca. 1303–1305), possibly initiating construction works there. If so, the right side of the arch may have once borne the name of his mother, Anna, who acted as his regent.
- 24 On the synagogue and Jewish community of Ioannina, see Μπατίνου 2009, p. 141 ff.

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