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Lost heritage buildings in Cuenca-Ecuador: Historical analysis of the “Villa Roselena, in El Ejido of Cuenca”

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Abstract:

The demolitions of the historical buildings in Cuenca are related to the lack of collective consciousness about the Conservation of Cultural Heritage. For that reason, it is necessary to collect, organize and analyze information related to the history of the demolitions in Cuenca and the role of the different institutions in charge of heritage conservation. At the same time, it is relevant to include what the international and local documents say about lost heritage buildings. The subject of this paper focuses on the “La villa Roselena” located in “El Ejido de Cuenca” as a case study, which was demolished in May 2008. This paper concludes with some reflections regarding the conservation of monuments and the avoidance of the demolition of heritage buildings.

Keywords: Lost heritage, heritage buildings, Villa Roselena, Cuenca, Ecuador.

Resumen:

La demolición de los edificios históricos en Cuenca está relacionada con la falta de conciencia colectiva acerca de la conservación del patrimonio cultural. Por esta razón, es necesario recoger, organizar y analizar información relacionada con la historia de las demoliciones en Cuenca y el rol de las diferentes instituciones encargadas de la conservación del patrimonio. Al mismo tiempo, es relevante incluir los aportes de los documentos internacionales y locales sobre la pérdida de edificios patrimoniales. El tema de este trabajo se centra en la “La Villa Rosa Elena” ubicado en “El Ejido de Cuenca” como caso de estudio, que fue demolido en mayo de 2008. Este documento concluye con algunas reflexiones en torno a la conservación de los monumentos para evitar la demolición de edificios patrimoniales.

Palabras claves: patrimonio perdido, edificios patrimoniales, Villa Roselena, Cuenca, Ecuador.

1. INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of Cuenca into the World Heritage List in 1999 promoted the conservation of its heritage architecture in the Historical Centre and its surroundings. This process started in the 1970s, when the civil society started to be conscious about the right meaning of “heritage”.

However, since the middle of the 20th century, when the Uruguayan architect Gatto Sobral developed a new urban planning of the city of Cuenca, the modern architecture replaced some of the valuable monuments. Some examples of these monuments are: the Municipality building located around the Central Square, part of “El Convento del Carmen”, the chapel of “Sagrados Corazones”. At that time, the Historical Center did not exist and the people were not conscious about heritage. In 1982, the Historical Centre was included in the “Cultural Heritage of Ecuador”, (Municipality of Cuenca, *Propuesta de inscripción del Centro Histórico* 10) but the demolition of historical buildings did not stop. This process of demolition generated many discussions and different points of view of the citizens of Cuenca. Most of the discussions were about the conservation of the monuments’ values and the rapid loss of heritage buildings, which were replaced by modern architecture or parking lots, mainly in the Historical Center and its surroundings.

The international charters highlight the worldwide importance of the demolitions of valuable heritage buildings. The local legislation (1983) (“Ordenanza para el Control y Administración del Centro Histórico de Cuenca” 1-10) was not very clear about the type of interventions allowed in the Historical Center of Cuenca. The current legislation (2010) (“Ordenanza para la Gestión y Conservación de las Áreas Históricas y Patrimoniales del Cantón Cuenca” 27-45) is more complete in this sense, and serious sanctions are imposed when a heritage property is illegally destroyed.

The main aim of this paper is to analyze the history of the demolitions in Cuenca through a specific case study: “La Villa Roselena”. Based on this analysis, the present investigation tries to explain why demolitions occur and how they could be avoided, taking into account the different stakeholders such as the citizens, the authorities and the institutions in charge of the conservation of heritage buildings.

2. DEMOLITIONS IN HERITAGE ARCHITECTURE: INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL DOCUMENTS

In the 20th century the term “demolition” or “destruction” was included in the international charters of conservation, with the aim of preserving heritage buildings that had been severely affected. Demolitions of valuable buildings have happened throughout history, centuries and even millenniums ago. When a culture conquers another, one can observe different types of interventions, for example: construction over previous structures, resulting in a coexistence of styles, continuing with a previous architectural style or the total or partial destruction of monuments (Cardoso 1-2). This is an attitude which has been observed in the Roman period, in the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, etc. In the past, often a considerable lack of consciousness existed with regard to the conservation of heritage buildings, leading to the destruction of many of these. Only since the 18th century criteria for their conservation were introduced.

2.1 Demolition and its relation with the national and international charters

The international charters are documents written by experts from around the world and constitute a guide to different types of intervention in historical monuments.

Some of the national and international charters do not mention the word "demolition" as a type of intervention, but use other terminology like "destruction" or "removal" to define the fact that a monument is removed from its context.

What follows is an analysis of the principal national and international charters, emphasizing the articles that refer to demolitions.

“The Venice Charter 1964”

International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites.

Art. 6. “The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. Wherever the traditional setting exists, it must be kept. No new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and color must be allowed”.

Art. 11. “The valid contributions of all periods to the building of a monument must be respected, since unity of style is not the aim of a restoration. When a building includes the superimposed work of different periods, the revealing of the underlying state can only be justified in exceptional circumstances and when what is removed is of little interest...” (“The Venice Charter 1964”).

“The Restoration Charter 1972”

Art. 6. “... Should establish the safeguard and restoration operations and within these the following is prohibited:

- 2) Removal or demolition which cancels the passage of the artwork over time, unless it deals with small deforming or inconsistent alterations with respect to the historical values of the work (good) or the compliment in style which these falsify;
- 3) Removal, reconstructions and relocation to locations other than the original; unless this is not determined by superior conservation reasons;
- 5) Alteration or removal of the patinas.” (“The Restoration Charter 1972”).

“The Burra Charter 2013”

The Australia ICOMOS charter for places of cultural significance

Art. 8. “Conservation requires the retention of an appropriate visual setting and other relationships that contribute to the cultural significance of the place. New construction, demolition, intrusions or other changes which would adversely affect the setting or relationships are not appropriate”.

Art. 15.3. “Demolition of significant fabric of a place is generally not acceptable. However, in some cases minor demolition may be appropriate as part of conservation. Removed significant fabric should be reinstated when circumstances permit”. (“The Burra Charter 2013”).

“The Norms of Quito 1967”

Discussion about the preservation of the historical centers before the growth of the contemporary cities.

III. Part "...it must be acknowledged that the basic reason for the increasingly rapid destruction of this potential wealth is the lack of an official policy to enforce current measures for protection effectively." ("The Norms of Quito 1967")

It is worth mentioning that in the international charters measures are proposed to avoid the demolitions and destructions of valuable heritage buildings. In the Norms of Quito the reasons why these demolitions occur are explained, stating that this is mainly due to the lack of an official policy which regulates the destruction of the heritage buildings and to a wrong idea of urban progress.

2.2 Demolition and its relation with local regulation

The city of Cuenca was included in the World Heritage List in December 1999 with its original name "Santa Ana de los Rios de Cuenca". Sixteen years have passed and the city now has more specific regulations that dictate the types of interventions allowed in the historical area.

The last regulation was published in 2010 to complement the previous regulation of 1983. The Municipality developed this new regulation to allow for a tighter control on how to intervene in heritage with its conservation as its aim. Within these regulations is included the word "demolition" as a type of intervention. In the next articles the rules that regulate the type of intervention in buildings are shown, emphasizing those that refer to demolitions.

2.2.1 "Regulation of the management and conservation of the historical and heritage areas of the Canton Cuenca"

Chapter II shows the definition of "demolition" as applied to buildings and public spaces: demolition "consists of the total or partial elimination of a building" ("Ordenanza para la Gestión y Conservación de las Áreas Históricas y Patrimoniales del Cantón Cuenca" 32).

In chapter III the types of intervention according to the buildings' values are specified. In case of buildings without special value "these will be eligible for conservation, architectural rehabilitation as well as the substitution by new buildings, provided that the determinants of the sector and the characteristics of the context are accepted". With regard to buildings with a negative value, these will be eligible for demolition and substitution by new buildings. ("Ordenanza para la Gestión y Conservación de las Áreas Históricas y Patrimoniales del Cantón Cuenca" 35).

In chapter IV general intervention rules relating to demolitions are shown:

Art. 19 – No inventoried building with some level of heritage value, even when it is in a bad state of conservation, can be demolished. It must be conserved according to the permitted interventions and corresponding with its grade of value, as shown in Art. 15.

Art. 20 – The buildings without special value and buildings with a negative impact can be demolished totally or partially with the prior authorization of the historical and heritage areas authorities, which will later grant the respective construction permit for the new building.

Art. 22 – The buildings that do not respect the approved plans and non-authorized interventions that do not obey the regulations must be demolished after the corresponding legal procedures.

Art. 23 – Modern elements added to heritage properties will be removed, unless the valuation study shows its importance. Modern elements will be admitted when they provide to the building improved living conditions, hygiene and health, such as sanitation, ventilation, ceilings, etc. when these elements do not affect the structure and typology of the building and when these elements are reversible. (“Ordenanza para la Gestión y Conservación de las Áreas Históricas y Patrimoniales del Cantón Cuenca” 35).

As one can observe this regulation has very clear manifests about conducts in buildings in the historical center of Cuenca and especially related to demolitions. The question is whether in reality this regulation is giving the expected and desired results.

2.3 Demolitions and the loss of heritage values of a building, its identity and authenticity

A study aiming to protect, promote or conserve a monument is based on the identification of its inherent values (Santana Quintero 32). In this context the authenticity performs an important role that should be seen as a layered concept of values. According to the Nara document, (The Nara Document on Authenticity 1994) a cultural heritage’s authenticity and values are defined by the source of information about this cultural heritage. “Conservation of cultural heritage in all its forms and historical periods is rooted in the values attributed to the heritage. Our ability to understand these values depends partially on the degree to which information sources about these values may be understood as credible or truthful.” (The Nara Document on Authenticity 1994, párr. 9).

The meaning of the word "authenticity" is intimately linked to the idea of truth; it is authentic when it is true, when it is for sure, when there is no doubt. The monuments and sites are material objects, carriers of a message or argument, whose validity in the frame of a social and cultural context and the comprehension and acceptance by the community turn them into heritage goods. (The Brasilia Charter 2).

The identity is a form of belonging and participation. The value of the category identity is achieved through the sense of belonging towards the heritage properties, towards the place where one lives and the capacity to do work that includes the whole community.

3. THE HISTORY OF CUENCA AND ITS DEMOLITIONS

This part shows a short historical summary of the city of Cuenca with the objective of putting into perspective the demolitions in the region where the case study of the Villa Roselena was conducted.

3.1 Brief history of de city of Cuenca

Cuenca is located in a valley in the mountains (Sierra) in the highlands of Ecuador at approximately 2500m (8200 ft) above sea level. Since ancient times Cuenca has been suitable for human life, as it has been permanently irrigated by 4 rivers: Tomebamba, Tarqui, Yanuncay and Machángara.

Originally, in the fourteenth century, Cuenca was a Cañari settlement called Guapondeleg, which means "land as big as heaven". Around 1470, the Incas conquered the Cañari people and occupied Guapondeleg and the surrounding areas. When the Incas arrived to this city,

they named it Tomebamba, which means "River Valley of Knives". The Inca architecture is well known for the art and techniques of working with stone, the urban planning and the perfect harmony with the environment. During the Inca Empire, Tomebamba was destroyed in the war between Atahualpa and Huascar, who were two Inca emperors as well as brothers. On its ruins the city of Cuenca was founded by the Spanish conquerors.

The conquest of America by the Spanish Crown took place from the year 1492. In order to maintain control of the continent, they established several towns and cities. Santa Ana de los Ríos de Cuenca (Sta. Anne of the Rivers of Cuenca) was founded on the 12th April 1557 by the Spanish general Gil Ramirez Dávalos. The urban layout responded to the criteria established by the so-called Laws of Indies. According to this document, the streets were designed following the direction of the cardinal points (north-south and east-west), which created a "layout grid" characteristic to Spanish cities. In the center of the grid was located the Central Square surrounded by important buildings such as, among others, the church, the municipality and the prison (Albornoz 69-71).

After almost three centuries of Spanish domination, in 1822 the country obtained its independence. The architecture of Cuenca changed during the late 18th to early 19th century, with a large influence of the Neoclassicism French style. Finally, in the mid-20th century the presence of the Modernism Movement dramatically changed the urbanism and the architecture of the city. This process of change in many cases led to the loss of important heritage buildings.

3.2 The history of demolitions in Cuenca

The demolitions of buildings in Cuenca were realized according to development, form of living and growth of the city. Towards 1860, several demolitions were carried out because of economic prosperity related to the export of husk (cascarilla, quinine) and later the export of straw hats. The new social class was born and the exporters had the need to improve their houses. The craftsmen had to adapt their abilities to satisfy the changing tastes of the exporters, who wanted to change their houses to the European habits, which caused the demolitions of one floor houses and colonial mansions. In their place came villas with Paris style façades, with windows and balconies of forged steel (Torres Hidalgo 28). The European influence was caused by the many travels of wealthy people to Europe, who returned with photographs and drawings of European buildings.

At the end of the 19th century some houses were affected partially while others were affected completely. In some cases they were rebuilt in new forms, especially with regard to the façades, replacing the modest colonial façades of earthen masonry with much more decorated ones (Calle y Espinoza 9).

It was believed that the modern was equivalent to destroying the old, but it was done without order, without an interest in preserving the historical and cultural values. And thus important traditional architecture buildings were destroyed and today it's possible to see brick and cement buildings where before earthen buildings stood (Ochoa 79).

Around 1940 modernism arrived to Cuenca, which was led by engineers and architects who already were influenced by this trend. Several iconic buildings were overthrown, since these were considered to be unhealthy, old, useless, etc., in exchange for buildings with the following characteristics: high, flat, large windows, terraces and no tiled roofs. Buildings

with these characteristics are called “straight line architecture” (Torres Hidalgo 32). The family homes are transformed and are constructed of two or three stories. Furthermore, patios are closed, windows are enlarged and doors are converted into new entries for new commercial offices or parking lots. The house was no longer used only by single families and one started to rent them out, whether for retail, offices or apartments.

It is worth mentioning that not only the civil architecture suffered, but also the catholic churches. With the same eagerness for modernization, during the 2nd decade of the 20th century many churches in the Historical Center of Cuenca were demolished or their façades changed.

Below are some buildings of the city of Cuenca that have been completely or partially demolished.

El Carmen de la Asunción (partially demolished)



This is a colonial monastery with enclosure walls (no windows and doors) that closed the block located diagonally from the Cuenca’s Central Park: “Calderón Park”. In the 70’s, wide gardens and colonial buildings disappeared to make room for buildings with more than two floors without any value right in the middle of the Historical Center of city.

Fig.1. Enclosure wall of the Monastery “El Carmen de la Asunción”.
Source: Collection “Fundación El Barranco”

Old Municipality Building (totally demolished)



The demolition of the Old Municipality Building is one of the examples of what happened in the city between 1950 and 1960. During this time several buildings were demolished, since they were considered old, dirty, unhealthy and unusable. A modern building was built in its place, designed by the Uruguayan architect Gilberto Gato Sobral.

Fig. 2. The Old Municipality Building.
Source: Collection “Fundación El Barranco”

Other demolished buildings are among others the house of the Ordoñez Mata, situated in the streets Luis Cordero and Bolívar, the church San Miguel, which today is the Hotel Dorado, the old building of “Gobernación”, the “Carmen Bajo de Cuenca” Monastery, the chapel of “Sagrados Corazones”, the church and convent of the “Padres Salesianos”.

4. ANALYSIS OF THE CASE STUDY: THE VILLA ROSELENA

The objective of the case study is to realize a critical analysis of the Villa Roselena, with the aim of establishing more and better criteria and arguments for the conservation of similar buildings in the future.

4.1 Location

The Villa Roselena is located in the avenue Fray Vicente Solano, which is very close to the city's Stadium "Alejandro Serrano Aguilar". The villa was built in the 2nd decade of the 20th century (1922) and has its importance due to it being one of the first mansions in the lower part of the city of Cuenca, known as "El Ejido". In this period in time, this part of Cuenca was not urbanized yet, but it belonged to the rural part of the city. The avenue Fray Vicente Solano is an axis connecting the historical center of the city of Cuenca with the lower part of El Ejido. It is an important road with regard to the development of Cuenca and is surrounded by important buildings, such as the University of Cuenca, several educational institutions, part of the municipality of Cuenca, elegant houses and companies. The following map of 1947 shows the location of the villa in relation to the Historical Center.



Fig. 3. Map of 1947.

Source: Albornoz, Boris, *Planos e imágenes de Cuenca*. 150

4.2 The history of the Villa Roselena



Fig. 4. La Villa Roselena.

Source: Collection "Fundación El Barranco"

Juan Íñiguez Vintimilla built the house (1922) in the avenue Solano, very close to the "Benigno Malo" High School. It caused the admiration and concern of his friends, for risking to live in "the middle of the wilderness", like they were used to say in that time. It is the photographer Serrano who, in the year 1927, immortalized the mansion in a historical

photograph (Fig. 4), in which one clearly notices that the landscape around the mansion has a unique characteristic vegetation, without other buildings in its surroundings (“La villa Roselena” 1).

This house received its name “Villa Roselena” in honor of Madam Rosa Elena Arteaga Crespo, wife of Juan Iñiguez Vintimilla. Its construction was not with the aim of solely spending vacations, like many other houses during this time in “El Ejido”, but on the contrary, it was built to live. The family lived in this mansion for several decades. Later this mansion was rented out for commercial purposes.

At the death of Madam Rosa Elena Arteaga, the building stayed in hands of her heirs, who later on sold the property. The “villa Roselena” was demolished on May 1st 2008 and a new multi-story building “Valgus” took its place.

4.3 Traditional construction materials and systems

The walls of the Villa Roselena were constructed of adobe for the lower part and bahareque for the higher part. The walls have a width of 1,20m so that the constructive system could have been combined between bearing walls of adobe and partition walls of bahareque. The walls and the ceiling were almost completely covered with paintings (murals). The structure of the roof was of wood and covered by tiles.

As one can see, this building was constructed using traditional techniques and materials.

4.4 The heritage values present in the Villa Roselena

The Villa Roselena was one of the first buildings constructed in the sector El Ejido (1922), after which started a rapid process of urbanization of the city of Cuenca halfway through the 20th century. At this time began the so called modern city.

From the characteristics of this building one can say that its construction was a transitional period between the colonial and republican architecture. Indeed, it has colonial characteristics such as the use of materials like adobe, wood and tile. On the other hand, it is a pioneer of a new type of architecture: the republican, in which the technology allows for the presence of large windows to enable the entry of light into the rooms, using in some cases arches. Furthermore, it has a lobby that distributes the circulation at the entrance of the building. This differs from the colonial architecture, in which the patio was the circulation hub for the entrance to all rooms.

In summary it is a building that has colonial and republican characteristics, which are combined in such way that give the Villa Roselena a harmonious expression between its parts, with clear characteristics of authenticity and identity.

In the interior of the building were, almost in its entirety, wall paintings (murals) and wooden paintings on walls and ceilings. The paintings showed a large variety of flower and other motives that represented animals, European landscapes, the shield of Cuenca, etc. Murals were also used to simulate decorative elements in the cornice and footing/base. The painter of the murals was Leonidas Paredes H., whose signature is seen in one of the photographs. In addition to the murals, the fine woodwork in some architectural elements, such as the interior balustrade stand out.

The villa was enclosed by handmade bricks and the main gate was of wrought iron, which in the top shows the name of the Villa Roselena. It is important to highlight the detail with which the two elements have been made, giving an artistic value to the building.

Its owner and builder, Dr. Juan Iñiguez Vintimilla, was a man of work, study and art. Indeed, he held important public positions both locally as nationally, such as: Justice Minister, university professor, rector of the “Colegio Benigno Malo”. Furthermore, he was a poet and writer of several literary works. He was an important personality who also has the distinction of being one of the pioneers in fostering the growth of the city to the south, known as El Ejido.



Fig. 5. The former Villa Roselena.
Source: Collection “Fundación El Barranco”



Fig. 6. The current building Valgus
Source: Rosa Pintado

5. DISCUSION

5.1 Why do demolitions occur?

Based on the information obtained from the Villa Roselena, one observes that there are several factors which influence the demolition of a heritage building, resulting in the loss of its values:

Lack of awareness of the citizens

To care for a country’s heritage is a duty of its citizens. The ignorance of many people in Cuenca towards heritage has caused partial and total demolitions of heritage buildings, due to economic factors or to new architectural tendencies. This has led to serious damage to the heritage of the city and the world.

Profit motive: wrong idea of progress

The economic factor has been decisive in the history of the demolitions in Cuenca. In fact, due to the economic growth and a wrong idea of progress, the way to see and do architecture changed, resulting in demolitions of the old and replacement by the new and modern. In some places, where there has been a lack of resources, the heritage architecture has been preserved, like for example in some marginal sectors of the city, especially in the country side.

Lack of promotion by the authorities (awareness campaigns)

To conserve the heritage it must be valued and to value it, it must be known. It is the duty of the authorities who work in institutions in charge of the preservation of the heritage to realize

awareness campaigns in schools and colleges with the aim of teaching people the values of heritage buildings.

In many cases the citizens consider having a heritage building as a punishment, since they feel that they are not allowed to do interventions according to their desires. This situation could be different if advantages and options to capitalize on the heritage building without having to demolish it are presented to the citizens. In other words they need to see the monument as a “cultural resource”, through which several factors are linked, such as among others heritage valuables, identity and authenticity, tourism and socio-economic aspects.

The lack of awareness of some institutions that have as goal the conservation of heritage has resulted in not clear heritage building policies and regulations. It is important that the municipal regulations are obeyed. In this sense, clear norms for the intervention in heritage buildings should be determined, which take into account their values, as well as seriously sanctioning those that have demolished a monument.

Furthermore, it is important that the institutions that are in charge of the conservation of heritage (Municipality of Cuenca, INPC (National Institute of Cultural Heritage) and the University of Cuenca through the vlrCPM project “World Heritage City Preservation Management” work together, joining forces and sharing information.

5.2 Society’s Response to the demolitions of heritage buildings

In the city of Cuenca people have a very active response to the demolitions of heritage buildings or the loss of valuables in public spaces. A good example is the response to the demolition of the “Villa Roselena”, shown by public protests of the citizens of Cuenca in different media.

The declaration of Cuenca as “World Heritage City” increased the people’s interest in the conservation of monuments, in the sense that restorations were starting to be carried out of the most important buildings in the city. Nevertheless, heritage architecture needs specific rules which allow for its conservation, in which the interrelation between the owner of the building and the authorities is fundamental.

5.3 The necessity of documenting the heritage

Before their demolitions, little to no information was known about the Villa Roselena and several other heritage buildings in Cuenca. With their demolitions not only disappeared their physical structures, but also all of their heritage values, such as history, constructive systems, etc. Would these demolished heritage buildings have been registered using the correct documentation techniques future generations would have had the ability to know, learn and see what these heritage buildings were like, even though their physical structures were demolished. This is one of the reasons that correctly documenting today’s heritage buildings is important.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The demolition of the “Villa Roselena” is without a doubt a loss for the city, because of the heritage values that this building possessed.

The international charters mention the necessity of preserving historical monuments, prohibiting demolitions that remove or alter a heritage building partially or completely or that are not in accordance with the historical context of its surroundings. The Quito Norms mention the reasons why heritage buildings are demolished, which are basically due to a lack of policies that regulate the conservation of monuments as well as to a wrong idea of progress. In the city of Cuenca, the last updated regulation was published in 2010, which substituted the previous one (1983) and presents the different types of intervention in accordance with the values of the heritage buildings. This regulation clearly establishes that demolitions can be done in buildings without special value and buildings with a negative impact. However, even this new regulation could not stop the demolitions of some heritage buildings in Cuenca.

The conservation of a monument starts with the identification of its values. It is shown that the Villa Roselena possessed many values such as: historical, expressive, artistic, technological and intangible; and therefore the conclusion is that it should have been conserved. Most of the demolitions in Cuenca (as one can see in the Villa Roselena case study) have their origins in one of the following: lack of awareness of its citizens, motive of profit: wrong idea of progress, lack of promotion by the authorities (awareness campaigns) and lack of vision of the institutions in charge of the conservation of the heritage. It is therefore needed to fight these causes to decrease the number of demolitions in the city of Cuenca.

Furthermore, heritage buildings need to be documented, especially those of high value, since once they are destroyed it is impossible to know about their heritage values, which results in an irreversible losses that would affect the conservation of monuments and sites.

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