

## CROSS-BORDER ENTREPRENEURSHIP WITH A FOCUS ON THE OTTOMAN MONUMENTS OF LESVOS

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### **Abstract**

*Tourism expands roads and builds bridges. In a micro-community level, people have fun and are interested in culture because they feel like they contribute to/ become more aware of their historical national heritage. As mentioned on the Greek Ministry of Culture's website, there are many monuments on the island of Lesvos, landmarks of cultural heritage, which provide information on the history of a place with a great past. On Lesvos's map, some of the buildings from the time of the Ottoman Conquest of the island are depicted. Taking into consideration the importance of those monuments, the purpose of this research is to study the perception of a Turkish tourist on their stay in Mytilene as a tourist destination and the first image formed regarding the potential of these Monuments, built for various reasons after the island's conquest, for tourist exploitation.*

*In contradiction with Erdogan's late statement "We may come suddenly one night", Turkish tourists want to "spend a pleasant night" in the taverns and ouzeri on the island. Thus, although, as a nation, we, seemingly, live under the threat of war, at a local level, Turkish visitors enjoy delicacies of Mytilene, while listening to music originating from Asia Minor, as well as oriental music. The Ottoman Monuments of Lesvos form an important part of the area. This study focuses on the value of preserving and exploiting the cultural past and history associated with the Ottoman Rule on Lesvos and the Ottoman monuments on the island. Are they interested since the monuments are part of their past? How could these monuments be better valued/utilized and displayed, so as to stimulate interest, making them more visible and attractive? There are questions that this study tries to answer through a both.*

**Keywords:** *cultural itineraries, tourism, Ottoman Monuments, Lesvos. Cross-border , cultural entrepreneurship.*

### **1. Introduction**

As mentioned on the Greek Ministry of Culture's website, there are many monuments on the island of Lesvos, landmarks of cultural heritage, which provide information on the history of a place with a great past. There are many monuments on the island of Lesvos, landmarks of cultural heritage, which provide information on the history of a place with a great past. On Lesvos's map, some of the buildings from the time of the Ottoman Conquest of the island are depicted. Taking into consideration the importance of those monuments, the purpose of this research is to study the perception of a Turkish tourist on their stay in Mytilene as a tourist destination and the first image formed regarding the potential of these Monuments, built for various reasons after the island's conquest, for tourist exploitation.

According to the findings of archaeologists, the island of Lesvos has been continuously inhabited from prehistoric times until today and this is confirmed by its excavation findings (Harisis, 2000). During the period of ancient history, the inhabitants of the island were mainly farmers and sailors. In 1462 the Turks beat the Gatelouzos Family and dominated the island

of Lesbos. Historical facts report that Muhammad initially asked Gatelouzos to surrender the island, but he refused, considering the desire of the inhabitants to resist, despite the fact that he was offered financial rewards as a bribe (Kontou, 1962). According to Paraskevaides (1970), on September 1<sup>st</sup> attacks began, which were initially thwarted with the help of the Rhodians, but after a few days the Rhodians were exterminated and the fortress of Mytilene began to suffer significant damage. On September 13<sup>th</sup>, 20.000 Turkish soldiers invaded the castle, capturing those resisting (Tzimis, 1966). The next day, the inhabitants of the island decided to surrender and informed Muhammad by setting a condition to release those under siege. In the meantime Gatelouzos, in his attempt to avoid the death penalty, claimed that he was forced to resist by the islanders. The Sultan, however, reneged on the agreement. He first conducted a population census and then captured a large percentage of them to turn them into slaves or protectors of the walls. A considerable number were expelled to Constantinople, too (Delis, 1977).

From the moment the Ottoman rule began on the island, populations settled there and buildings were constructed to serve them, with priority given to the mosques and hammams.

## **2. Ottoman Monuments**

As for the Ottoman monuments, according to the oral tradition of the island, the largest mosques were built by Greek master builders. Noteworthy is both the architecture of these creations, which obeys specific rules, and their interior decoration (A.P.G., 2012). Mosques have a specific structure and decoration and are a gathering place for the religious needs of the Muslims who spend many hours in them. They serve specific architectural standards, with a specific direction and their interiors are arranged in a specific way. The Hammams are Turkish baths, which offer relaxation services, among other things. From an architectural point of view, eminent attention was paid to the dome of the baths, the light and the warmth these spaces exude (Ameen, 2017).

### ***2a. The status of memories - Visitation of turkish tourists***

i. According to the page of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lesbos of the Ministry of Sports and Culture regarding the visitability, the castles of Mytilene, Molyvos and the mansion of Varelzidaina are renovated and open to the public, from 8:30 to 15:30, except Tuesday, with a ticket price of 2-3 euros. The castle of Sigri has undergone conservation work but remains closed and guests can only visit the outer areas of the castle. In the town of Mytilene, the Tsarshi hammam and the Yeni mosque have been restored and reconstructed and are accessible to visitors. For the mosque of Mesagros and the mosque of Parakila no adequate information on their operation was found, while the Valide mosque is in need of restoration procedures and is, therefore, closed.

In relation to the national promotion of the monuments, it was noted that there is information posted online for the majority of the monuments. There are also websites with some basic information to the visitor, created under the auspices of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Lesbos. As far as outbound tourism is concerned, the promotion of the aforementioned websites has Greek as the main language and the page of the Ministry of Sports and Culture has included English. Following research by the University of the Aegean, on the initiative of Pavlogeorgatos (2008), having identified this gap, Turkish was added as a communication language.

ii. Also of particular interest are the reports on the numbers of Turkish tourist arrivals in the first years of their frequent visits to the island.

The president of the Tourist Agents, Yannis Samiotis, says that "in 2010, the first year that Turkish tourists came to Lesvos (from August onwards), we had about 10,000 arrivals. Consequently, the 15,000 arrivals in 2011 represent an increase of 50%. It is time to understand that the tourist prosperity of Lesvos will only come from the East. This does not mean that we should ignore other tourist resources" (Samiotis, 2011).

"Turkish tourist visits surpassed 15,000 in 2011, with the last 129 celebrating the New Year on the island. Overall, in 2011, Turkish tourists who came to Lesvos made their presence noticeable throughout the island, arriving at the port of Mytilene with a total of 15,146 people" (Samiotis, 2011).

2022- "The good news, however, according to Panagiotis Hadjikyriakos, comes from the Turkish market which has moved and is still moving at a good pace for the time period and circumstances and arrivals are expected to top the 15,000 that was the initial target for this season after the two-year pause due to coronavirus" (Hadjigeorgiou, 2022).

### 3. Quantitative research - Interviews

#### Demographic

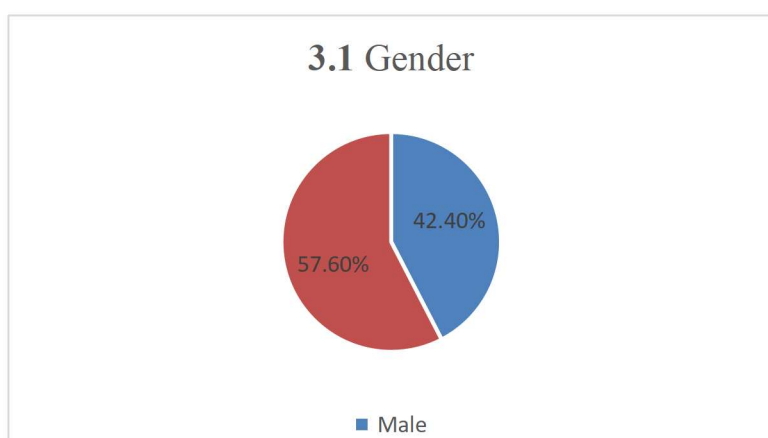


Figure 1: gender

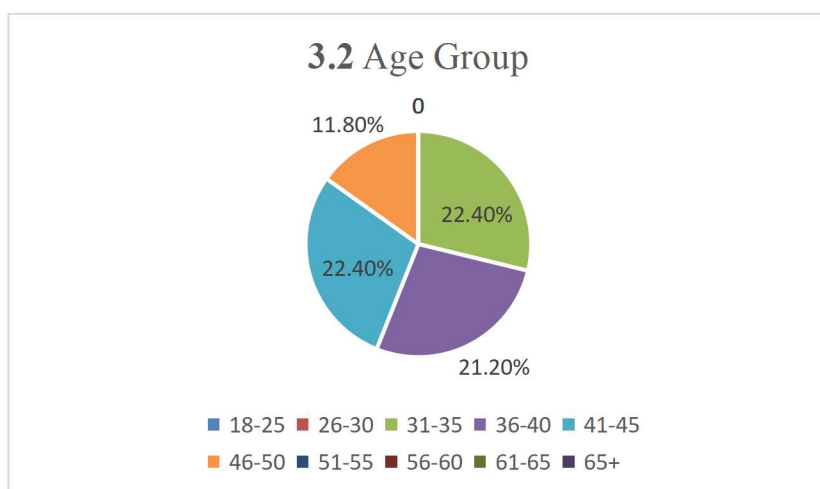


Figure 2: age

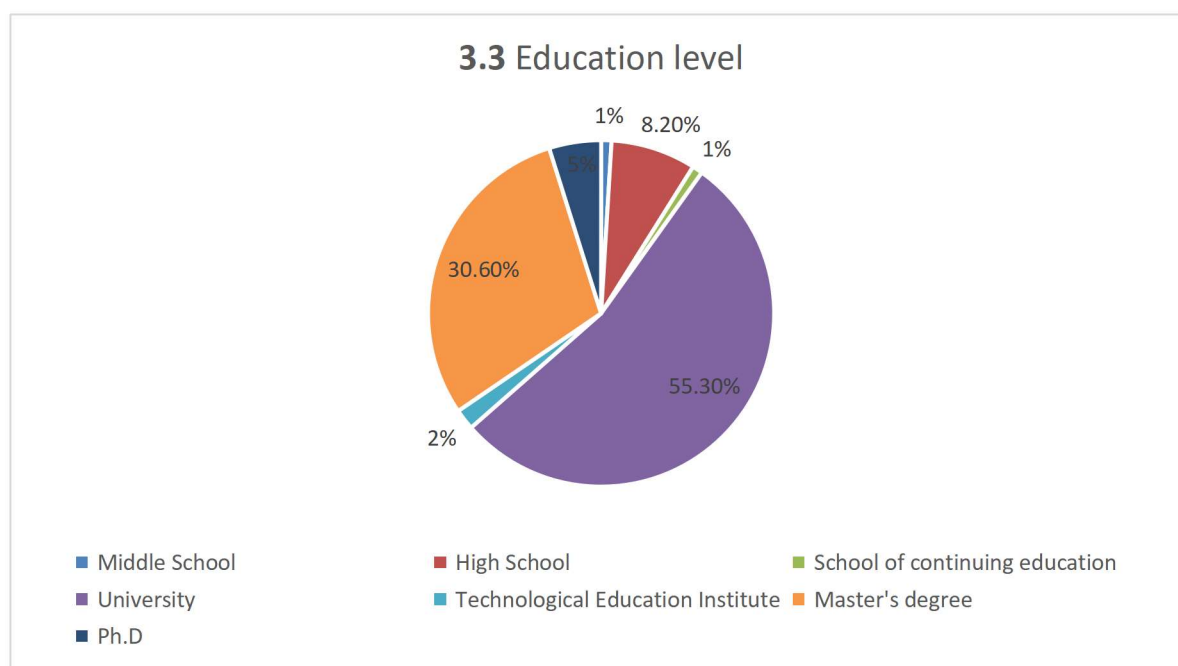


Figure 3: education

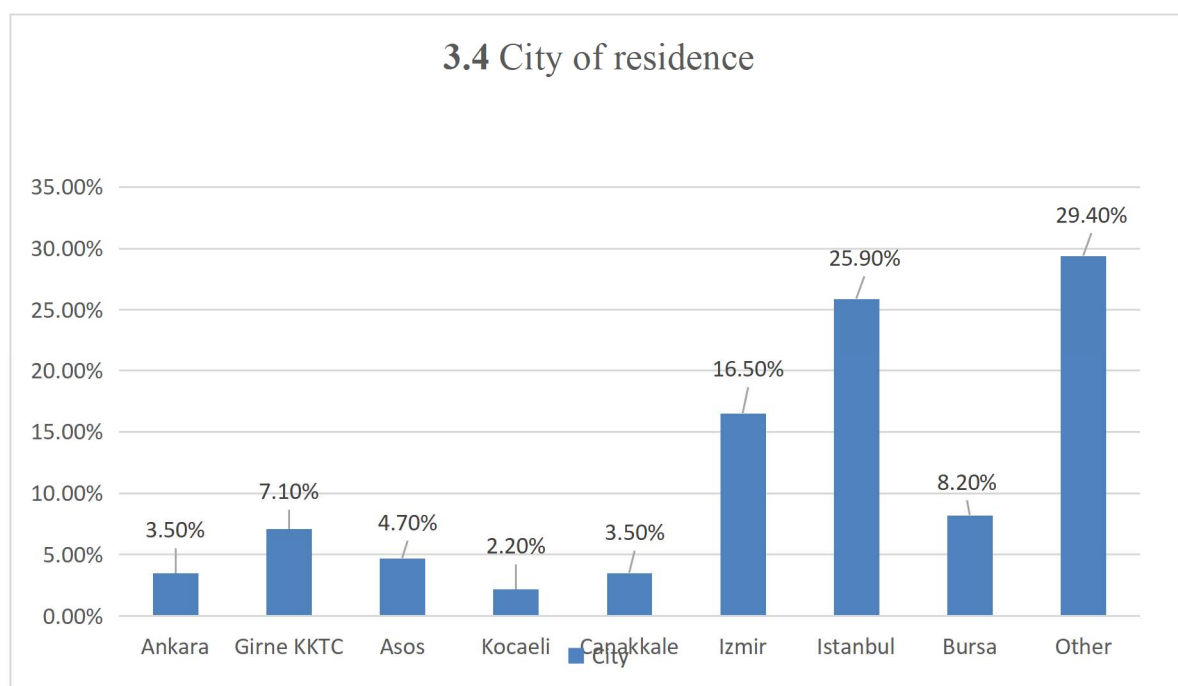


Figure 4: residence

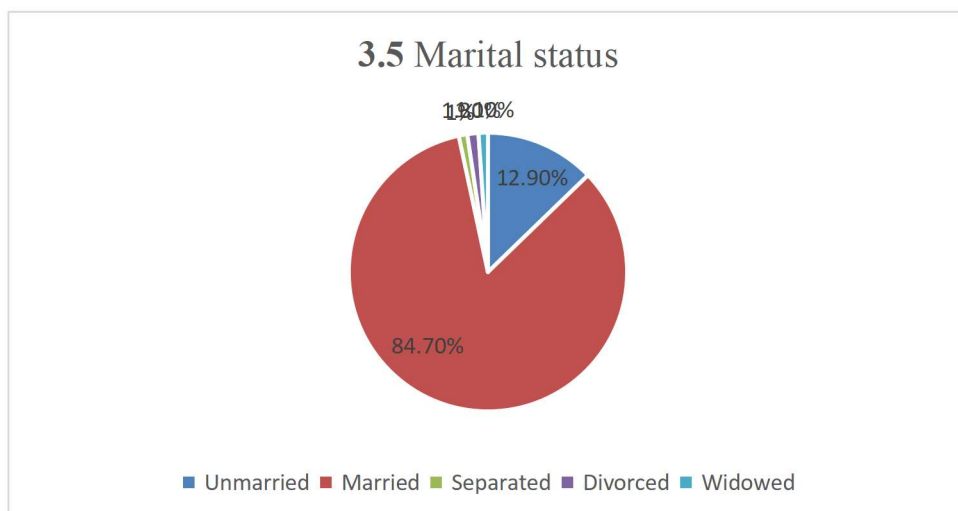


Figure 5: status

**Questions for respondents who have already visited the island**

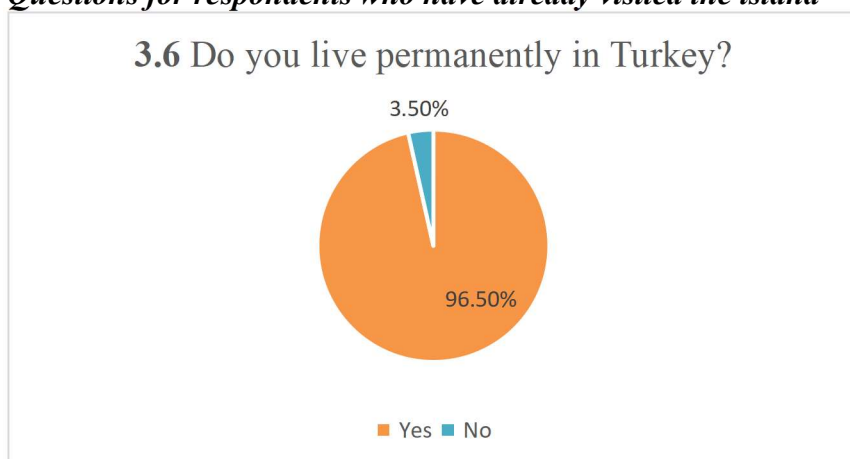


Figure 6: permanently in Turkey

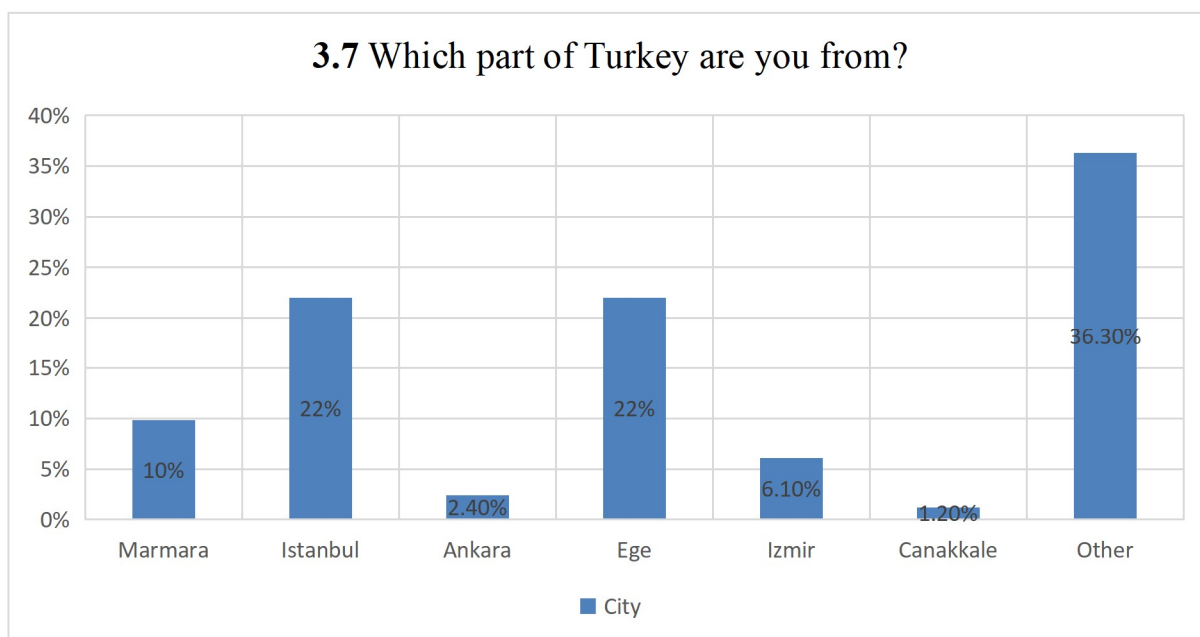


Figure 7: city



Figure 8: 1st time at Lesvos

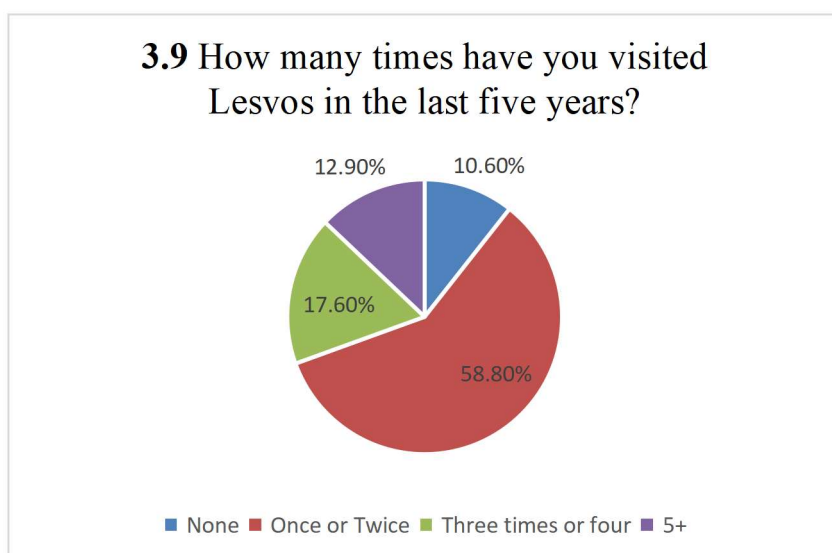


Figure 9: visits during the last 5 years



Figure 10: member of tourist group

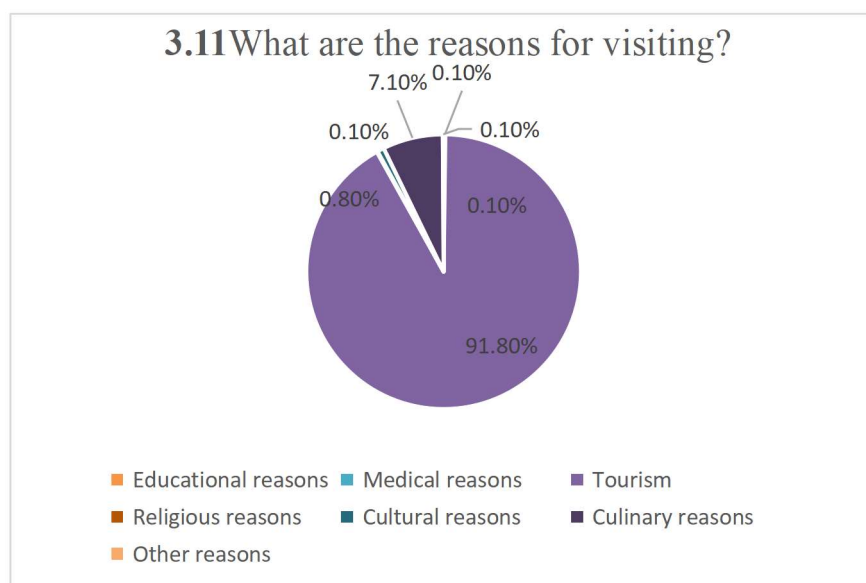


Figure 11: reason

#### 4. Comments on questionnaire and interviews

The visitation and interest of Turks in the Ottoman monuments of Lesvos was also analyzed. The most important Ottoman monuments and their characteristics, as well as the development of Turkish tourism in Lesvos, were highlighted

Based on the results of the quantitative survey, we conclude that most of the participants have visited Greece several times in the past. Many of them have not visited Lesvos before, but stated that they would like to revisit if they had the opportunity. Moreover, many people were not aware of the existence of Ottoman monuments on the island. Also, the age of the respondents, who are predominantly under 35 years old, may play a role in this, which means that the monuments and heritage pieces are not on their priorities. Out of the existing monuments, the participants knew the main ones, such as the Yeni Mosque and the castle of Mytilene.

After the qualitative research interviews conducted in the city of Mytilene, we obtained very interesting information about tourism in general on Lesvos and especially about Turkish visitors. The 3 interviewees were:

- Hadjikyriakos, P. (2022) - Owner of a General Tourism Office and President of the Lesvos Travel and Shipping Agents Association, in communication with the authors, stated that "Tourism on the island of Lesvos has dropped sharply in recent years, in terms of, either international tourists, or Greek tourists. From about 60 to 70 thousand European tourists, the island is now visited by about 35,000. Also from 50,000 Turks, 15,000 are now coming to the island, while as far as Greek visitors are concerned, from about 90,000 in total, about 30,000 to 40,000 visited Lesvos. There is also a vertical drop in cruise ships as, from 90 to 100 ships that once visited the island, now arrive only about 20. This situation is attributed to various reasons, mainly the long-term economic crisis and the refugee issue, based on the images that have been published mainly by the international media, images such as drownings, poor living conditions, etc. However, none of the media has bothered to show the other side of Lesvos. As a result, a potential tourist has probably formed a completely wrong impression."

- Sinanis (2022), a journalist from Mytilene, in direct communication with the authors on September 2nd, pointed out that "the existing Ottoman monuments on the island of Lesbos are not in proper condition, they are completely abandoned and there is no real upkeep on them. This results in various incidents when someone wants to visit them. The poor condition of the Ottoman monuments displeases strongly the neighboring country's senior officials, who come to the island, in order to visit them. In fact, there has been a proposal that the Turks themselves provide funds for the conservation and promotion of some of the monuments, a proposal that has not been accepted. Mytilene is visited by mainly wealthy citizens of Turkey and this is due to the expensive visa, which costs up to 170 euros. Taking into calculation the travel, accommodation and entertainment expenses, the amount is greatly increased. Thus, even for a few days, potential tourists need sufficient money, in order to be able to travel and enjoy their holidays on the island of Lesbos".

- Avdan F. - owner of a General Tourism Office of Turkish origin, in a personal communication with the authors, indicated that "The reasons why visitors from Turkey come to Lesbos are mostly recreational. Most of them come to experience the cuisine of the island, the local ouzo and other regional products, i.e. mainly for culinary and leisure reasons. They have also been the reason for the reintroduction of music in many shops on the island, according to their wishes. Tourists are interested in cultural activities related to their homeland, but it is not the primary reason for visiting the island. However, there are a satisfactory percentage of tourists who come well informed and want to visit as many of the Ottoman monuments as possible."

## **5. Suggestions of Cultural Routes and mapping**

Cultural routes, according to Avgerinou (2009), link cultural goods together and integrate them in a common and inter-scientific context, thus enhancing the significance of their different categories. A cultural good is defined as any good in the creation of which there is a human contribution.(Manola, 2020,2019). These goods are categorized as corporeal or abstract and constitute the cultural heritage of the place, where they are found, as they were created in the past and are related to its historical development. Cultural routes are an important tool for the utilization of monuments and, at the same time, a modern practice of portraying the cultural heritage of a place.(Manola & Papagrigoriou,2020).Designing those, is an informational tool; according to Karavasili & Mikelaki (1999), the cultural route is a communication procedure and the role of the visitor, as a key factor of its success and as an active participant in its interpretation, should not be neglected.

Furthermore, according to Mitoula & Kaldis (2018), very important for the promotion of a place is the "brand name" of the cultural route, which is the main communicational tool. To create this, the cultural heritage assets of the selected place must be recorded and categorized and a unified framework, in which they will be included, must be created. This is a necessary input for the completion of the process and the proposition of the cultural route, which is related to the cultural identity of the route through a recognizable name, known as a "brand name". The aim of the above is for the public to associate the area with its cultural heritage and to develop a distinctive brand name with a focus on culture Manola& al,2022)..

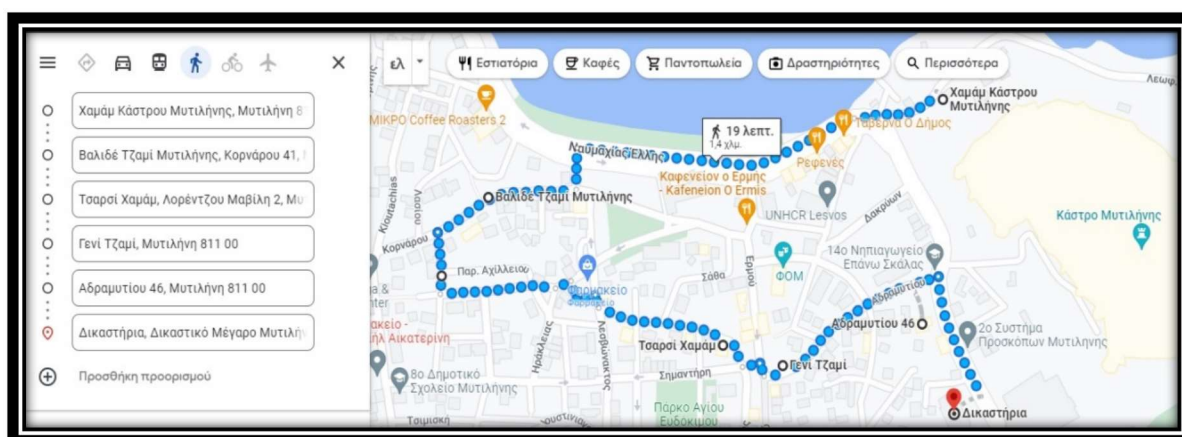
According to Bitsani (2004), the availability of integrated cultural products through the cultural routes provides high quality services to visitors, so that they prolong their stay and promotes their positive experience in their professional and social environment or in social media. This has the effect of increasing the desirability of the destination, as well as adding value to the touristic product.

- After its liberation from the Turks in 1912, Lesbos was incorporated with the rest of Greece on 1914 and is a region of the Greek State to this day.



- In the effort to organize cultural routes, the Ottoman monuments of Lesvos are categorized based on their geographical location on the map of Lesvos in four (4) routes.
- Starting from the airport 'Odysseas Elytis' of Lesvos, the visitor can start his/ her route from the old market, which is a continuation of the current market, to encounter the Charsi Hammam, the Yeni Mosque and the Valide Mosque, which were places of prayer on a daily basis for the Turks. Further north, the route continues with a visit to Mytilene Castle, whose use under the Ottomans was mainly military. Close to the castle are the present courts which were used as a training school under the Ottomans as well as the present Art Gallery, formerly an Ottoman small house of the last descendant of the Koulaxides family, Halim Bey.
- A few kilometers (about 20 km) further south, towards the villages of Gera, a characteristic monument of the era is the Mosque of Mesagros, with its characteristic minaret and the Hammam, which is private property.
- The third suggested cultural route includes the mansion of Vareltsidaina in Petra, which is a typical example of Ottoman architecture, the castle of Molyvos, which is the second largest on Lesvos, as well as the recently renovated Hammam of Molyvos.
- The fourth route includes a visit to the Parakila Mosque and the village of Sigri, where the presence of the Ottomans is still evident with the castle, the mosque, the bath, the school and the aqueduct.

***1st ROUTE: Mytilene (Mytilene Castle - Valide Mosque - Charsi Hammam - Yeni Mosque - Art Gallery - Mytilene Courts of Justice)***



*Figure 12 – 1st route*

- Castle of Mytilene: Located in the capital of Lesvos, it is one of the largest castles in the Mediterranean. Over the years, it came under the domination of both Byzantine and Ottoman empires, and, as a result, it has undergone some alterations from its original architectural construction (Molinos, 1984). It is a structure that has withstood natural phenomena. The damages it suffered in the earthquake of 1384 were repaired and the castle remained functional. In terms of houseroom, it is divided into three parts, only two of which are open to visitors. During the Ottoman sovereignty, in the Castle, two mosques, a tekkes (Ottoman monastery) and a mendreses (seminary) were built, which satisfied the needs of Muslims for prayer, education and union with religion (Karydis & Kiel 2000).

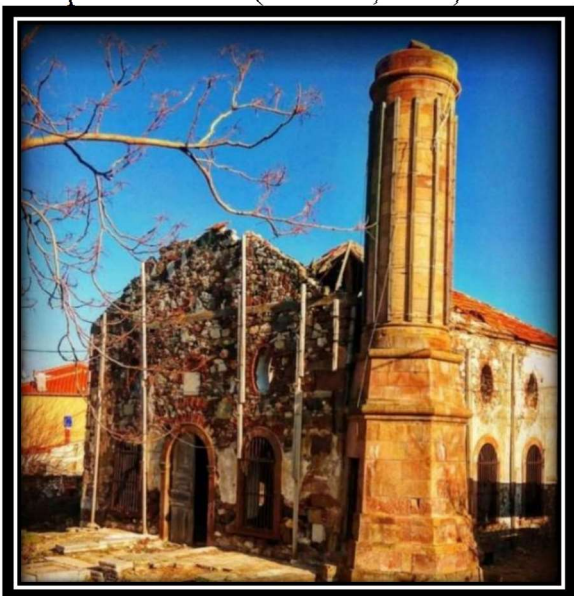


*Figure 13 - Castle of Mytilene a*



*Figure 14 - Castle of Mytilene b*

- Valide Mosque: The Valide Mosque is the oldest Ottoman mosque of Mytilene and is located in the area of Epano Skala. It was built around 1780. In its characteristics, the building is stone-built consisting of one floor, while it has a marble well and a stone minaret. Its interior design has many colors and in the past a multitude of religious and social activities took place inside it (Samaras, 1973).



*Figure 15 -Valide Mosque*

- Charsi Hamam: It is part of the Yeni Mosque complex. It was built in the early 1800s and was the main bath of the market. It is open for visitors since 2011, following the repair and restoration work carried out under the care of the 14th Committee of Byzantine Works (Loupou, 2012).



*Figure 16- Charsi Hamam*



*Figure 17- Charsi Hamam*

- Yeni Mosque of Mytilene: It is the largest and newest Islamic mosque in the city. It is located in the area of Epano Skala. The year of its construction is estimated to be 1830 and it included a bathhouse, a café, a cemetery and houses. It had a very high minaret of 30 meters, but only its base is preserved today. From an architectural point of view, it was a combination of Byzantine and Christian architecture. Due to increased public interest, in 2000 restoration works were carried out by the Ministry of Culture. It is mainly used during the summer season (mytilene.gr).



*Figure 18- Yeni Mosque of Mytilene*



- Gallery: It is located at 46 Adramitiou Str in an old Ottoman small house that belonged to the last descendant of the Koulaxides family, Halim Bey. It was built in 1880 and until 1923 it was used as the residence of the Koulaxidis family. When the population exchange occurred and the family left, the building housed Greek refugees. Each room was occupied by a family in the form of a commune. At the beginning of 1990 the Municipality of Mytilene started the restoration of the building, since it was in a tragic condition, and in 1999 it was opened as a Municipal Gallery (Anagnostou, 1993).



Figure 19-Gallery

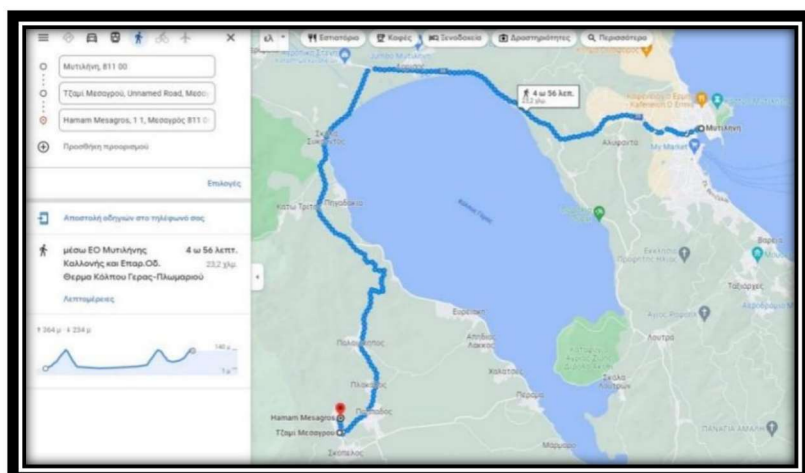
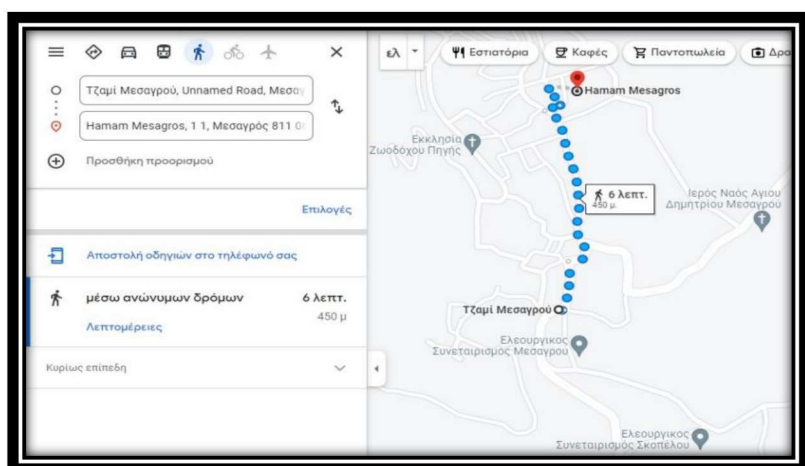
- Courts: The Ottoman Gymnasium of Mytilene (Intandie) was housed in this place, which opened for the first time in 1896 (dsmyt.gr/2020). Its construction was funded by the Ottoman Government and cost 8,000 liras. According to Lykiardopoulou - Kontara (2010), " in 1897 130 students attended the school, four of which were Greek. The curriculum consisted of teaching Turkish, Persian Arabic, French and Greek."



Figure 20-Courts



Figure 21-Courts

**2nd ROUTE: MESAGROS (Mesagros Mosque - Mesagros Mosque - Hamam Mesagros)**Figure 22 – 2<sup>nd</sup> route aFigure 23 2<sup>nd</sup> route b

- Mosque of Mesagros: The mosque is located in the community of Mesagros, across from the famous bakery painted by Theophilos. It dates back to 1550, and has a characteristic minaret, where the symbol of the Orthodox and the Muslim faith are engraved. More specifically, it features the cross of orthodoxy with the crescent moon. It is remarkable for the detailed decoration of its mihrab and its oak entrance door (Chatzidimitriou 2006).



Figure 24- Mosque of Mesagros

- Hamam of Mesagros: According to testimonies of the local residents *"Many Turks used to live here and that is why it has a ruined old mosque and old baths. The many years of coexistence have passed habits from one nation to another. They introduced us to washing in the hot water of the hammam."* The local Turkish hammam dates back to 1898. It was built by Turkish workers for private use by the family residing in the mansion. It has also been refurbished by the private owner, in an attempt to reopen it in the traditional way, but there was no tourist interest and the efforts collapsed. According to Yialousi (2017) "the space and services were reminiscent of oriental care and the effort was more than impressive and brave".



Figure 25- Hamam of Mesagros



Figure 26- Hamam of Mesagros

### 3rd ROUTE: PETRA-MOLYVOS

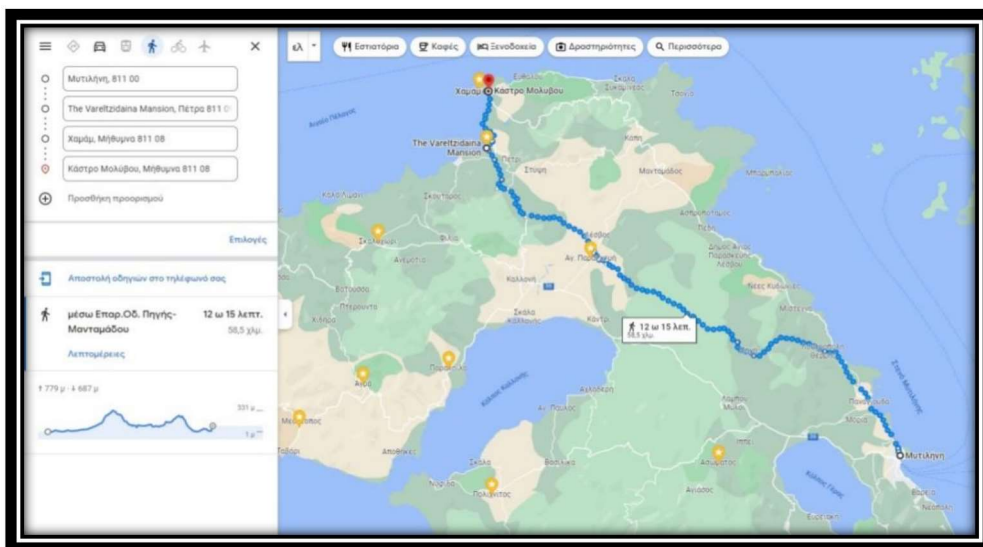


Figure 27 - 3<sup>rd</sup> route a



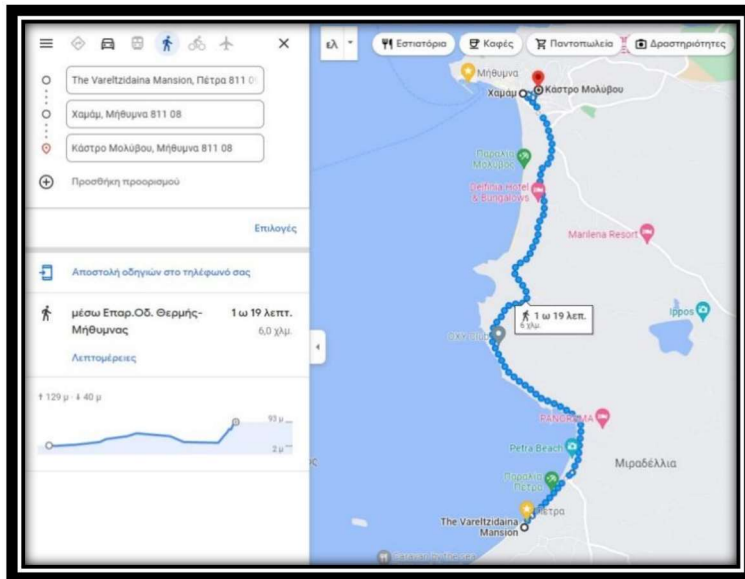


Figure 28 - 3<sup>rd</sup> route b

- **PETRA**-The mansion of Varelzidaina (The Varelzidaina Mansion): This mansion is a typical example of the architecture of the Ottoman period and combines many of the elements of decoration found in other manors. It is located in a central spot of the settlement of Petra, it is two-storey, stone-built and inside there are several frescoes of folk art, while wood has been used in its construction. Its decoration was made between 1700 and 1900 (Loupou, 2012).



Figure 29- The mansion of Varelzidaina



Figure 30- The mansion of Varelzidaina

- **MOLYVOS (MITHYMNA)** - Castle of Molyvos: The castle of Molyvos is the second largest castle on Lesbos and its construction is placed around 1373. It is located in the area of the ancient city of Mitimna and its current good condition is mainly due to the maintenance actions taken by both the Byzantines and the Ottomans. Today it consists of 10 towers with corresponding meta-towers and has 3 entrances, making it accessible to the public (Georgiadou, 2012).



*Figure 31-Castle of Molyvos a*



*Figure 32-Castle of Molyvos b*

- **Hamam Molyvos:** The hamam is situated in the center of the market of Molyvos, on Konstantinos Doukas Street. It has been classified by the Ministry of Culture as an 'Ottoman monument historically preserved'. This is how the use and function of this Ottoman building as a hamam was highlighted. All its architectural, morphological and construction characteristics were emphasized. The monument was included in the city's list of monuments open to visitors. Today it is a typical example of the style, function, use and construction of the Ottoman baths.



*Figure 33-Hamam Molyvos*



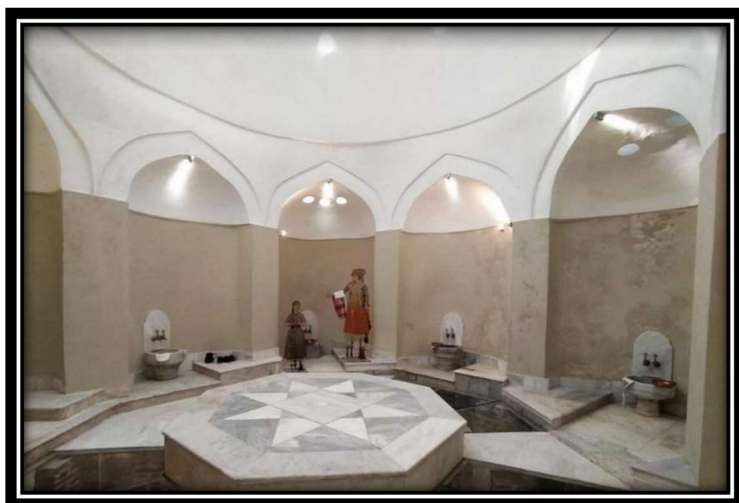


Figure 34-Hamam Molyvos

#### 4th ROUTE:PARAKILA-SIGRI

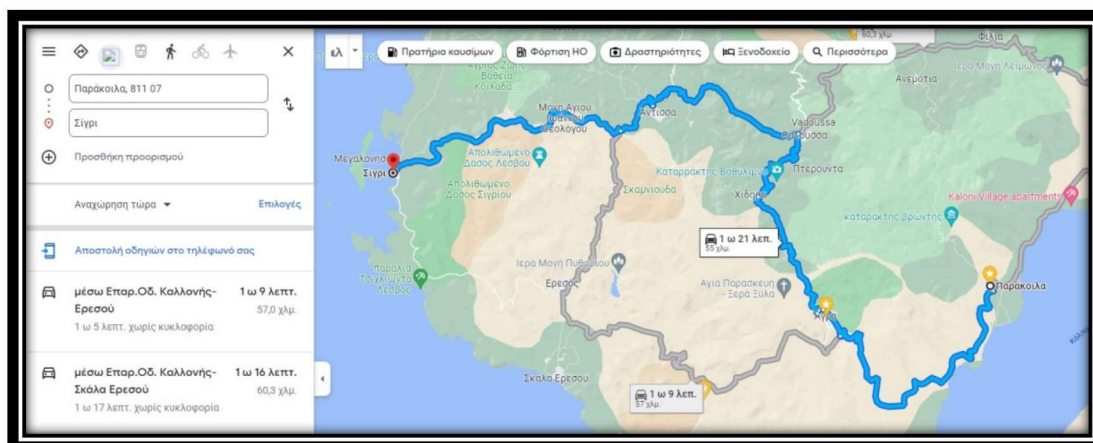


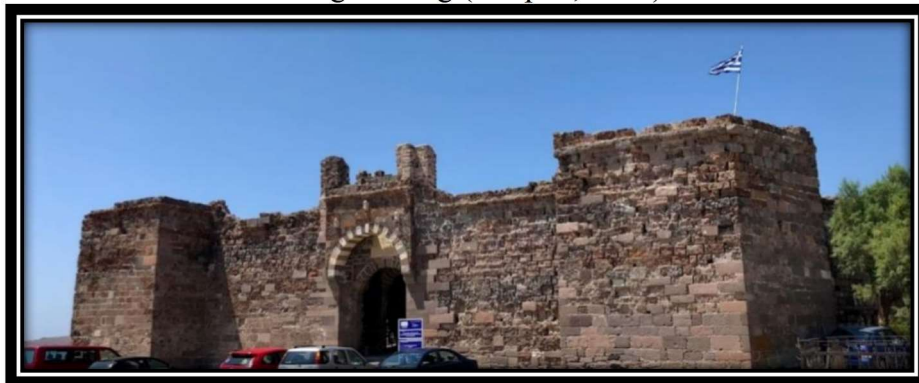
Figure 35 – 4rth route

- PARAKILA: Parakila Mosque: It is built of stone, while it has a minaret and a mihrab, i.e. a dome indicating the direction to Mecca, which today are the only ones in a preserved state, unlike the main building which has collapsed (Chatzidimitriou 2006).



Figure 36 -Parakila Mosque

- **SIGRI:** Sigri Castle: Sigri Castle is located on the western side of the island and 93 km away from the capital Mytilene. It was built in 1757 by Suleiman Pasha during the Ottoman period to protect the area from pirates. In 1789 the castle had a guard of one hundred men, armed with two hundred cannons. Today, the castle is in fairly good condition, but only its exterior is available for sightseeing (Loupou, 2012).



*Figure 37-Sigri Castle*



*Figure 38-Sigri Castle*

- In Sigri there was also a mosque, a bathhouse, a school, an aqueduct and baths that are still in a state of ruin. The Mosque has been functioning as the village church since 1923 (Chiotis, 2000).

## **Conclusions**

The study and the interviews converge on the fact that the island of Lesvos, apart from the beautiful beaches for summer holidays, has a particularly rich history, part of which is the Ottoman period, as witnessed by the presence of the Ottoman monuments. In the last decade, significant conservation and restoration initiatives have been taken, while the positive aspect is that within the last five years, websites have been created on the Internet to promote these monuments. In an island with diverse natural surroundings, where the existence of museums, thermal springs, churches, etc. is extensive, it is essential to draw the visitor to attractions such as the Ottoman monuments. This could be achieved through the extension of the monuments' opening hours, so that they operate evenings and through public information in the form of billboards at central points of the island. In addition to the aforementioned

proposals, particular attention should be paid to attracting tourists from the neighboring country. The Ottoman monuments are part of the Turkish people's history and knowing that the Ottomans stayed on the island for several years, we understand that a visit to the monuments can provide a lot of insight into their daily life. The state should focus on attracting the Turkish community and this can be achieved by including Turkish language on the island's web pages for tourists. Meanwhile, a collaboration between the Municipality of Mytilene and the Turkish Ministry of Culture could be achieved for further promotion. In conclusion, it is worth noting that any increase in tourist flows from the neighboring country to the island would result in the improvement of relations between the two countries, the development of communication, as well as significant economic benefits. The study above, taking into consideration the current state of the touristic market in Lesvos, suggests organizing the Ottoman monuments in 4 cultural routes, based on their geographical location. The routes are mapped on the Lesvos map for better promotion and tourist exploitation of the surviving Muslim monuments of the island.

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