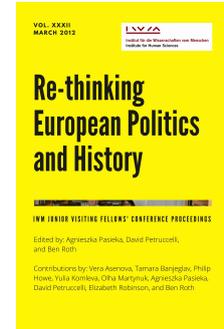


Sacred Hills and Commercial Downtown: Ethnic Meanings of Urban Spaces in Late Imperial Kiev

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The division between the Uptown and the Downtown in Kiev was already apparent from the first written records about the city. The natural landscape, with its stark differences in elevation, determined inner demarcations. The Uptown, often referred simply as hills (*pahorby*), is a chain of plateaus grooved by ravines and valleys forming three main uplands – Pechersk, Lypky and the Old City. From one side, the plateau connects to the river and forms a cliff in between, thus ensuring a natural protection for the city from possible invasions. Since the 11 th century, many churches and monasteries were built on hills, especially adjacent to the river zone. This attracted many Orthodox preachers and generally garnered fame for Kiev as a highly symbolic place for Orthodox Christianity. During the absolutist period of Russian Empire, there was also established a number of secular and administrative institutions in the Uptown – the Imperial palace, typographies and educational institutions.

In 1706, earthen ramparts around Pechersk were set up to form a fortress. Although by the end of the 19th century this fortress has lost much of its defensive capacity, its ammunition factory and storage remained fully functional. Although Pechersk and other Uptown areas had a big public significance for the city, in the early 20 th century they still were scarcely settled and had many green parks and orchards.

To the northwest of Pechersk, the chain of hills recedes further inland creating a lowland between the hills and the river, traditionally called Podil and Ploskaya (literally “Lowland” and “Flat Area”). Due to easy accessibility of land from the river a port and a harbor were established. Therefore, Podil had tremendous significance for commerce in the whole southwest of the Empire since most of the country’s wheat and sugar beet trade took place at its annual fairs. Apart from the wholesale trade there were numerous retail markets and shops in this area.

Until the mid-19th century, the Uptown and the Downtown were rather disconnected, forming in a sense autonomous localities. However, during the XIX century, as the city rapidly modernized and doubled its population every 20 years, previously empty spaces within the city were occupied, new districts emerged, and the existing ones grew denser. After a railway station was built in the lowlands located far inland, a new neighborhood “Lybid” soon

emerged. Many villages near the city were incorporated into the municipal limits. Finally, the valley between Pechersk, Old City, and Podil, which was previously a swamp, was drained and soon became the central boulevard of the city named Khreshchatyk (See map 1).

Although the geography of Kiev at the beginning of 20th century became much too complex to be described using only Uptown/Downtown terms, this mental division remained. Moreover, the residential patterns of different ethnic and social groups added new meanings to it. In this paper I will try to illustrate how the inequalities between various social and ethnic groups were reflected in the way fin-de-siècle Kiev was imagined. Also, I will trace the way the mental hierarchy of Uptown and Downtown was used in its public politics. My analysis will be conducted on two levels – statistical and discursive.

Ethnic Composition and Areas of Settlement

In 1926, the Ukrainian scholar Mykhailo Borovskiy conducted a statistical investigation under the title “National and Social Regroupings of Kiev Population in the post-Revolutionary Period (1917-1923).”^[1] This research is of particular importance for the study of urban development in late imperial Kiev since it contains detailed data on social profile of major ethnicities (Russians, Ukrainians, Poles and Jews) and their residential patterns on the eve of social revolution. Below I will use his accounts from 1917 and 1919, partly because no earlier statistical data on residential patterns as detailed as this is available. The 1917 and 1919 accounts, of course, are not fully representative of late imperial period since the WWI and the social revolution led to a decrease in the male segment of the population, an increase in unemployment, various migration processes, and the shaping of Ukrainian national identity. However, I expect the data on professional occupations and spatial distribution of different ethnicities to reflect the situation from the late Empire with sufficient precision. Occupations are rather stable characteristics reflecting long term trends, and it is also important to keep in mind that the redistribution of real estate property, nationalization of businesses, and the extermination of bourgeois and nobility classes started in 1919, after the data had been collected.

According to the data presented by Borovskiy, in 1917 the major ethnic groups in Kiev were Russians (49.4%), Jews (18.6%), Ukrainians (16.4%) and Poles (9.1%), while Germans, Czechs, Armenians, Karaites, and other ethnic groups constituted altogether 6.2% (See table 1). When viewed in the long term perspective, from 1874 until 1919, the dynamic was the following. The percentage of Poles within the total population remained more or less the same, ranging from 7.8% to 9.1%. However, in 1919 their number decreased to 6%, which was caused by emigration to Poland, reconstituted in 1918. In the following years their number continued to decrease. The number of Jews gradually increased from 10.9% in 1874 to 21% in 1919. This trend indicates that the city attracted many Jews in spite of the politics of selective integration, according to which only specific social groups could be granted permission to settle in the city. Also, this trend runs counter the idea that Pogroms caused a large Jewish emigration.^[2] The trend for Russians and Ukrainians within the population is less uniform, and this to a certain extent indicates contested nature of these identities. The category “Malorussian,” which was used in censuses before 1917 and in Borovskiy’s account is included within the term “Ukrainians”, was interchangeable with the category “Russian”, and was in fact regarded as a subcategory of “Russians”. The fluctuations in numbers of Ukrainians and Russians may also reflect successes and failures in respective national movements or politics of Russian

acculturation. In any case, the number of Russians, which fluctuated between 46.8-55.2% of the total population until 1917 decreased to 42% by 1919. At the same time, Ukrainians, who constituted 30.29% in 1874 decreased to 16.4% in 1917, but after the beginning of the social revolution and the establishment of Ukrainian National Republic their number increased and constituted a quarter of the total population.

Table 1. Ethnic groups in Kiev in late XIX-early XX cent.

Years	Ukrainians		Russians		Jews		Poles		Others		Total
1874	38.553	30.29%	59.652	46.8%	13.957	10.9%	10.409	8.1%	4.524	3.5%	127.251
1897	54.674	22.3%	135.096	55.2%	32.093	13.1%	19.233	7.8%	6.627	2.7%	244.723
1917	76.784	16.4%	231.379	49.4%	87.237	18.6%	42.819	9.1%	29.372	6.2%	467.591
1919	136.923	25.1%	232.148	42%	114.524	21.0%	36.828	6%	23.946	4.3%	544.369

Data presented by Borovskiy on social profiles of major ethnic groups in Kiev in various ways both supports and undermines conventional image of ethnic groups. It is possible to regard Poles and Jews as more bourgeois ethnic groups as compared to proletarian Ukrainians and the Russians present in all social niches. Jews had the smallest shares within their population of workers (20.2%) and servants (2.1%), the largest shares of liberal professionals and real estate owners (29.7%) and almost the same share of clerks as Russians and Poles. By the same token, Jews had the highest rate of unemployment in 1917 and a fairly small share of rentiers, which to a certain extent indicates the instability of their social positions. Poles had the largest shares of clerks (28.8%) and rentiers (3.0%), second largest share of liberal professionals (9.9%), but along with that they had a fairly high rate of workers (33.3%), servants (11.4%), and unemployed (5.0%). This runs counter the idea that Polish community in late imperial Kiev was uniformly bourgeois and wealthy, [3] as a bit less than a half of Poles belonged to the lower class. Russians were most equally present in all the social niches having no lowest or highest shares in any of the categories. Ukrainians were the most lower class ethnic group in Kiev having the largest shares of workers (42.3%) and servants (15.1%) and the lowest shares of rentiers (0.7%), liberal professionals (5%), clerks (23.3%), as well as unemployed (3.6%).

Table 2. Occupations among ethnic groups in 1917[4]

	Workers		Clerks		Servants		Real Estate Owners		Liberal Professionals		Unemployed		Rentier	
Ukrainians	17500	42.3%	9650	23.3%	6243	15.1%	4105	10.0%	2072	5.0%	1486	3.6%	290	0.7%
Russians	40150	35.5%	30520	27.0%	15953	14.1%	11710	10.3%	9113	8.1%	4212	3.7%	1407	1.2%
Poles	7400	33.3%	6340	28.8%	2518	11.4%	1730	8.0%	2210	9.9%	1091	5.0%	651	3.0%
Jews	7350	20.2%	9980	27.5%	773	2.1%	10716	29.7%	4585	12.6%	2574	7.0%	314	0.9%

Accurate assessment of social inequalities based on the presented data is a difficult task, however, as the categories refer to different social positions. For example, the category “Real estate owner” may equally refer to a house owner who can have a solid profit from rent and a farm household on the outskirts of the city that can barely sustain its members. Similarly, the category “clerk” refers to bureaucrats at all levels, as well as to clerks in non-state commercial institutions. Also, it should be considered that the presence of numerically smaller minorities

of Poles and Jews in numerically smaller middle class may have seemed more palpable in the overall social structure. Similarly, their numerically small presence in numerous lower classes may have obscured the fact that there were large shares of Poles and Jews in working class and service sector.

How did the social composition of ethnic groups relate to residential patterns in late imperial Kiev? It could be expected that in the rapidly growing and modernizing city, various bourgeois groups would tend to gain housing in the newly constructed buildings within the city center and in the adjacent neighborhoods. It could also be expected that the national minorities would tend to secularize and intermingle with each other in public life. To a certain extent this was the case of Kiev, and in fact none of the districts in late 19th and early 20th centuries was uniformly mono-ethnic. However, in Kiev, just like in a number of other cities of the Russian Empire, there was legislation limiting Jewish residence to certain districts. Moreover, Jewish settlement in Kiev was allowed only since 1859 and only to certain categories of the population, which caused particular unevenness in their settlement.

Most Jews could settle in the lowland districts of Podil, Ploskaya, and Lybid, with the exception of first-guild and second-guild merchants, who had a right to settle in all districts of the city. Podil, its northern extension Ploskaya, and Lybid were the poorest neighborhoods with the lowest real estate prices, which was caused by a lack of amenities like sewage and running water, though towards 1914 this situation changed for better. In 1870s Ploskaya and Lybid were most densely populated districts and had the highest child mortality rates. In fact, in 1873, the growing Jewish population was blamed by the newspaper *Kievljanin* for increased number and strength of cholera epidemics in Kiev. Only one quarter of buildings in Ploskaya had gardens and kitchen plots, well below the city average.[5] Podil and especially Ploskaya were frequently flooded, and during the 19th century also suffered two devastating fires. According to Borovskyi, in 1919 Jews constituted an absolute majority of population in Lybid (61.9%) and Podil (62.8%) districts, and a relative majority in Ploskaya (44.3%)[6]. (See map 2).

Although merchants of the I and II guilds had a right to settle in the Uptown, there is evidence that some of them opted to reside in districts fixed as official. This can be explained by the proximity of synagogues and other Jewish public institutions, as well as by the possible proximity of merchants' businesses. Yet, most well-off Jewish merchants settled in the prestigious district of Lypky and Old City, which offered many more benefits of urban modernization. In 1919 Jews constituted 20% of population in Lypky and between 13% and 17% in Old City.[7] Traditionally Lypky was a residential district with only detached mansions owned by high-ranking members of the city administration and military commanders. In the late 19th century, this district attracted the nouveau riche – sugar factory owners, bankers, etc. The most wealthy and famous Jewish families resided there – Brodskys, Libermans, Galperins and Zaytsevs. The real estate prices were naturally the highest in Kiev, and almost every house had a garden.[8] In 1874 almost 30% of the Jewish population in Lypky and Old City spoke other languages than Yiddish at home, with a 66% literacy rate in Russian. This indicates a higher level of assimilation among Kiev's Jewish elite[9].

Unlike Jews, other nationalities had legal rights to settle in every district of the city, and their residential patterns are less uniform and pronounced. Most Poles lived in the Uptown, however, according to the 1919 census, they preferred the Old City (14.6%) and newly constructed neighboring districts Bulvarno-Fundukleevskiyi (12.3%) and Lvivskiyi (10.3%),

rather than Lypky, where their share of total population was 9.9%. In the Old City and neighboring districts were located many public institutions, in which Poles took active part, in particular the University of St. Volodymyr, stock exchange, and city council. There is evidence that Polish public life especially concentrated in and around the newly built Khreshchatyk Boulevard, which was recognized in the late 19th century as the city center. Here were located the Catholic cathedral, numerous Polish retail shops, cafes and hotels, clubs and newspaper offices, a grand bookstore that served all ethnic groups, and numerous smaller bookshops.[10] Nevertheless, according to the 1919 census, many Poles also could be found in the distant, semi-urban districts Syrets (8.6%), Sviatoshyno (8.6%), as well as in Lybid (8.2%).

Ukrainians constituted a majority only in Kurenivka district, which was located in the mixed hills and lowland area north of Ploskaya. The district was remote from the city center and was in a fact a semi-urban area with many farms and fruit gardens. However, Ukrainians also constituted a large proportion in the areas dominated by Russians, which again indicates that socially and residentially they were co-dependent groups.

Russians, numerically the largest ethnic group in late imperial Kiev, constituted a relative or absolute majority in most districts, except for the Ukrainian district Kurenivka and the Jewish districts Podil, Ploskaya and Lybid. Their dominance was absolute in Pechersk, and newly developed districts north of the Old City. Other districts, particularly Old City and Lypky were relatively dominated by Russians and contained other ethnicities more or less in proportion to their share in the overall population of the city.

The above represented statistical research and residential patterns of ethnic groups in Kiev in 1917 and 1919 indicate that historic parts of the city tended to be dominated absolutely by one ethnicity, while the new neighborhoods had mixed populations more or less parallel to the ethnic composition of the city. Jews were confined to the century old lowland districts Podil and Ploskaya, but also dominated the newly emerged Lybid. Russians had an absolute dominance in Pechersk. Other uptown districts Old City and Lypky, although being dominated by Russians, had a large share of Poles and Ukrainians. This peculiarity reinforced the century old division of the Uptown and the Downtown, adding ethnic meaning to it and politicizing other characteristics.

Hills vs. Downtown Symbolic Hierarchy

As the city of Kiev was growing and modernizing with exceptional success during the 19th and early 20th centuries, soon surpassing in numbers and significance Odessa and Kharkiv, scholars and public intellectuals made efforts to represent its glory and fame, as befit the largest city Empire's Southwest. The promoted image of Kiev emphasized the fact that in 988 Orthodox Christianity was adopted here and then spread to the north and east. Also, the medieval state called Kievan Rus' was regarded by historians as the beginning of the Russian Empire. The slogan "Kiev is a Mother of Russian Cities," drawn from medieval manuscripts and reformulated in modern Russian, became a sort of slogan advertising the city. Other widely used metaphors were "Second Jerusalem," "Jerusalem of Russian Land," "Holy City," "Cradle of Russian Orthodoxy," etc. In 1888, Kiev widely celebrated the millennium of Orthodox Christianity, and on the slopes of its hills a monument to St. Vladimir, duke-baptizer of Kiev, was unveiled.

This kind of representation was very much pronounced in the guidebooks about Kiev, which were produced in large quantities in late 19th and early 20th centuries. In many cases authors started their virtual excursion in Pechersk, moved to the Old City and Lypky, after which they mentioned monasteries and churches on the outskirts of the city and then moved to Podil. Although the latter itself had many churches, monasteries, a theology school, and significant public places, it was given much less attention in the guidebooks. Podil was often regarded as a part of the city that emerged together with other neighborhoods after the hills were settled, a view which is no longer plausible.[11] One guidebook also emphasized the idea that due to the dense population and commercial status, Podil was very different from the rest of the city, constituting “a sort of separate city”[12]. The city was viewed as first and foremost Uptown with the neighboring districts of secondary importance. A quote by Malorussian writer Ievhen Grebinka, which was often cited in the guidebooks, and sometimes placed in the epigraph, is indicative in this sense:

How beautiful you are, my native Kiev! Kind city, holy city! How splendid, how bright you are, my grey-haired old man! Like the sun among the planets, like the Tsar among the people, is Kiev among the Russian cities. On the high hill it stands, surrounded by green gardens, crested by churches' golden onion domes and crosses like with a crown; under the hill lively waves of Dnipro-breadwinner disband. Both Kiev and Dnipro together... Oh God, what a splendor! Do you hear me, kind people, I'm telling you about Kiev, and you're not crying for joy? You must be non-Russians![13]

In this eloquent quote, Kiev is seen from the standpoint looking at Pechersk – churches' domes, greenery, proximity to the river. It is also assumed, that this is a Russian city, and other ethnic groups are symbolically excluded. In fact, the word “stranger” (“chuzhdyi”) was often used when talking about Jews and Poles, who were supposedly not a part of city's historical tradition and culture, thus not in a full sense its citizens. The metaphoric way to express this was often saying that the church bells do not ring in one's soul, that the beauty of the holy places does not provoke pious feelings.[14]

Not only the Uptown was mentally connected to Russianness, but it was also symbolically connected with the state. In late imperial Kiev around a dozen monuments were constructed to various significant figures from the history of Russian Empire. None of the monuments was placed at Podil, while all of them were placed in the Uptown. In this sense the example about the debates on the placement of a monument to Taras Shevchenko is very indicative.

After 1905 Revolution, Ukrainian national activists set themselves a goal to construct a monument in Kiev to a romantic poet Taras Shevchenko, whom they regarded as a “father of the nation” and the most prominent Ukrainian artist. After the money were collected and permission was received, they organized a working group in Municipal Duma responsible for choosing the design and place for the monument. The working group, however, was composed of rival Ukrainian and Russian nationalist groups. The Ukrainian group wanted to place the monument in the Uptown, moreover, near one of the biggest churches – Mykhailivsky. They hoped that in this way peasant preachers would stop near the monument on their way to the church; “[one] if not pray would at least take a look”[15] – wrote Ukrainian national leader Ievhen Chykalenko. Russian nationalists were intimidated by the idea of placing Shevchenko's monument in this location, since they regarded him only as one of the good Malorussian poets and in no way deserving such a dignified place. Therefore, Russian nationalists began construction of the monument to St. Olga at a site near Mykhailivsky and offered to place

Shevchenko's monument at Karavaev square. However, Ukrainian nationalists did not accept this option, because the square was in the Jewish district. There were a lot of rows of shopping stalls, it was filthy and shabby, peasants would never go to that place, nor would intelligent people – wrote Chykalenko. Eventually, the monument was constructed only after 1917 in the Uptown, since the working group failed to come to an agreement regarding the place for a monument.

Yet, no other ethnic group felt the political implications of the Uptown/Downtown mental hierarchy more than Jews. In 1911, when the famous Blood Libel case started, the understanding of urban space was used as an evidence of the crime. Mendel Beilis was accused of murdering a Christian boy for using his blood to prepare Passover matzah. This particular person was accused because he lived in the vicinity of the site where the body was found. Moreover, this was a neighborhood where Jews were forbidden from settlement, but Mendel Beilis had special permission, as he was working on the brick factory located there. [16] The fact that he was the only Jew there was already perceived as a danger, as if an alien person threatened the Christian neighborhood.

Podil was in a constant threat of pogroms. In fact, the 1881 pogrom started here and moved up the city. Although the Jews were accused of parasitism and exploitation of the Christian population, the victims were the Podil's poor while the Jewish homes in Lypky remained for the most part protected. Yet, the pogrom of 1905 started in Khreshchatyk and only then descended into the Lowlands. At that time, public institutions located in the Old City were damaged too, and the Lypky's nouveau riche were attacked. Nevertheless, the idea that the Jews living in Uptown were more protected remained pervasive. Sholem Aleikhem in his piece "The Bloody Hoax" describes a pogrom happening as a result of accusation of Jews of ritual murder, which was a literary response to events occurring in Kiev in 1911-1913. When Sarah Shapiro, a Jewish protagonist, learns that a pogrom was going to occur, decided to hide in her relatives' place in the Uptown hoping she will be more secure there. Yet, she discovered that her relatives moved out from their house also fearing the pogrom. The only person in the house was a Russian yard-keeper, who feeling himself as the master of the situation yelled at her because she was a Jew.

Conclusions

The residential patterns of ethnic settlements reveal a large extent of urban segregation of Jews, who were locked into residence in lowland districts of Kiev. Due to this fact, the century-old division of the city into the Uptown and the Downtown gained ethnic meaning and became politicized. As a result of the nationalist discourse imagining Kiev as an essentially Russian City located on Sacred Hills, there was created a mental hierarchy, on one pole of which was a line of meanings "Upper Town – Sacred Hills – Christian – Orthodoxy – Russianness – State – Order – Nature – Beauty" and on the other "Downtown – Jewishness – Commerce – Congestion – Filth – Violence". This mental hierarchy was itself used for ethnic politics, in which symbolic presence in this or that part of the city determined the power relations of ethnic groups.

Map 1. Map of Kiev, 1894



Figure: Map of Kiev 1894. It is possible to see the division between the Uptown and Downtown on the map. Pechersk (green), Lyvky (blue) and Old City (red) have irregular planning, which is determined by the landscape. On the contrary, Podil (purple) and Lybid (yellow) are constructed in a regular way.

Notes:

1. Borovskiy, Mykola. "Natsionalno-sotsialni Peregrupuvannia Liudnosti Kyeva u Porevoliucijnykh Chasah." In *Kyiv Ta Yoho Okolycia v Istorii Ta Pamiatkah*, 431–475. Kiev: Derzh. vyd-vo Ukrayiny, 1926.

2. Meir, Natan M. *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: a History, 1859-1914*. Indiana University Press, 2010. 34-36

3. Zienkiewicz, Tadeusz. *Polskie życie literackie w Kijowie w latach 1905-1918*. Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Olsztynie, 1990. P.12. This idea was to a large extent promoted by Polish community in late imperial Kiev. In 1905 Szczęśny Potocki said "There are only 8% of us in this region [Russia's Southwest. – OM], but due to our hard work and intelligence, due to wealth and solidarity, we have a reputable life".

4. Borovskiy, Mykola. "Natsionalno-sotsialni Peregrupuvannia Liudnosti Kyeva u Porevoliucijnykh Chasah." In *Kyiv Ta Yoho Okolycia v Istorii Ta Pamiatkah*, 431–475. Kiev: Derzh. vyd-vo Ukrayiny, 1926. P. 448

5. Meir, Natan M. *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: a History, 1859-1914*. Indiana University Press, 2010. 34-36

6. Borovskiy, Mykola. "Natsionalno-sotsialni Peregrupuvannia Liudnosti Kyeva u Porevoliucijnykh Chasah." In *Kyiv Ta Yoho Okolycia v Istorii Ta Pamiatkah*, 431–475. Kiev: Derzh. vyd-vo Ukrayiny, 1926. P. 470

7. Ibid, 470. By 1919 the scheme of city parceling into districts altered so that the limits of the Old City are difficult to relate to the newly established districts. For this reason two numbers are provided.

8. Drug, Olga, and Dmytro Malakov. *Osobniaky Kyjeva*. Kiev: Kyi, 2004.
http://www.alyoshin.ru/Files/publika/malakov/malakov_000.html.

9. Meir, Natan M. *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: a History, 1859-1914*. Indiana University Press, 2010. 34-36

10. Zienkiewicz, Tadeusz. *Polskie życie literackie w Kijowie w latach 1905-1918*. Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Olsztynie, 1990. P. 13

11. Zakharchenko M.M. *Kiev Teper' I Prezhde*. Kiev, 1888. P. 245

12. Cit. Sementovskii, Nikolai Maksimovich. *Kiev, Ego Sviatyni, Drevnosti, Dostopamiatnosti i Svedeniia Neobkhozimye Dlia Ego Pochitatelei i Puteshestvennikov*. Kiev: N. Ia. Ogloblin, 1900. Meir 120

13. Cit. Zakharchenko M.M. *Kiev Teper' I Prezhde*. Kiev, 1888. “Какой ты красивый, мой родной Киев! Добрый город, святой город! Какой ты прекрасный, какой ты ясный, мой седой старик! Что солнце между планетами, что царь между народом, то Киев между русскими городами. На высокой горе стоит он, опоясан зелеными садами, увенчан золотыми маковками и крестами церквей, словно святою короною; под горою широко разбежались живые волны Днепра-кормильца. И Киев, и Днепр вместе...Боже мой, что за роскошь! Слышите ли, добрые люди, я вам говорю про Киев, и вы не плачете от радости? Верно, вы не русские»

14. Meir, Natan M. *Kiev, Jewish Metropolis: a History, 1859-1914*. Indiana University Press, 2010. Footnote on p. 329

15. Juriy Chepela. *Dyskusiya navkolo monumenta Tarasovi Shevchenku v Kyjevi naperedodni yoho stolitniogo yuvileyu*. MA thesis, manuscript. 2009

16. Beilis, Mendel. *Scapegoat on Trial*. Cis Communications, 1993

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