



Analyzing 3rd Century C.E. Coins at the Archaeological Site of Cosa

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Abstract

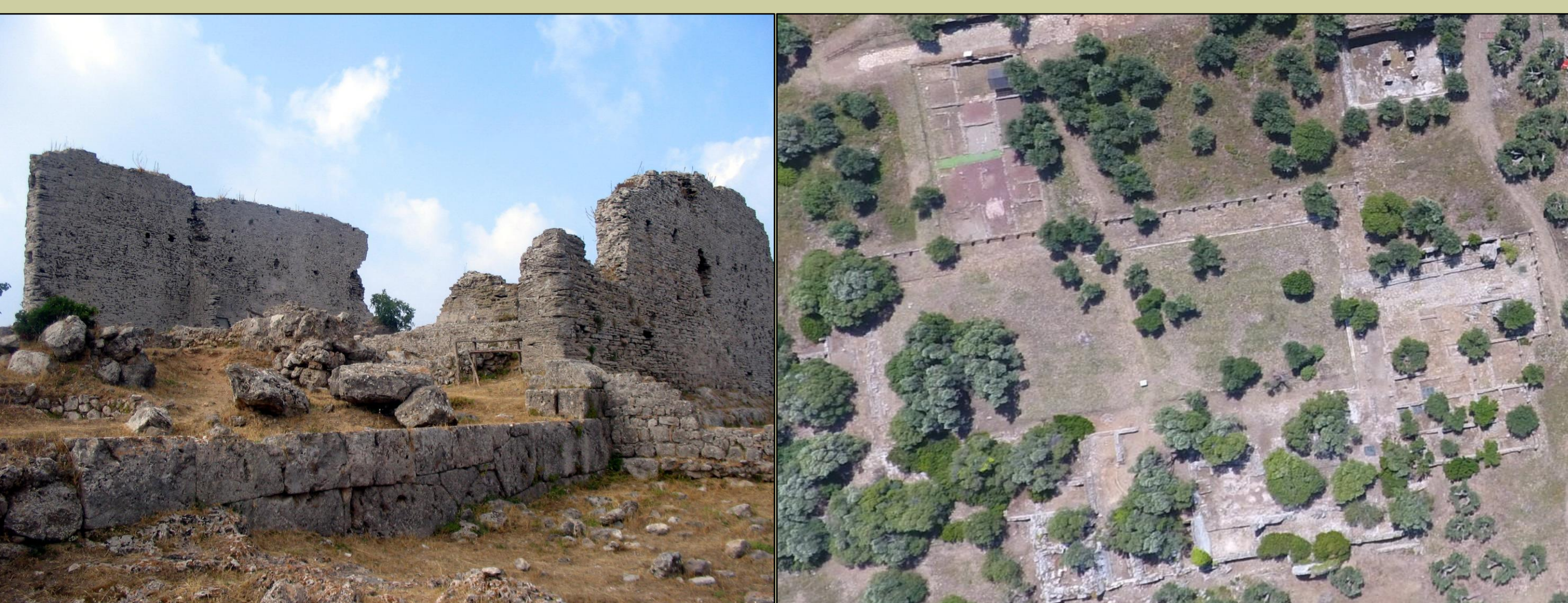
The site of Cosa on the Tuscan coast, Northwest of Rome, is one of the most important and representative locations in the corpus of American study and activity in Roman archaeology. The colony of Cosa, which has experienced intermittent excavation campaigns since 1948, is the focus of a research project conducted with doctoral student Melissa Ludke. Her project organizes and inventories the coins discovered during these excavations and was the basis for this investigation. Moreover, this poster displays and analyzes third-century coins from this catalog, utilizing mapping technologies to create a map that assists in contextualizing certain regions of the site and provides a deeper understanding of the city's inhabitation and activity during the third century CE. The significance of the spatial relationships between the find locations of the coins and the larger city plan and the urban landscape can bring to light potential areas of the town that were in use during this period and introduce a perspective that has seen little focus in the scholarship of Cosa until recently. Thus, modern software, such as AutoCAD, allows the find spots to be tied to actual geophysical data and offers a method to create an accurate overall site map for plotting coins.

Background

The ancient Roman settlement of Cosa lies on a hilltop with views of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the rolling Tuscan hills. After the Romans took control of the territory from the Etruscans, the city was founded as a new colony in 273 BCE. The site then rose to prominence in 197 BCE, and the site and its port flourished until the 1st century BCE when it was damaged and potentially abandoned. Under the emperor Augustus, a new revitalization program was undertaken, bringing "new life" to the settlement. These efforts revived Cosa as a settlement throughout the Imperial period, seeing investment from various later emperors, such as Hadrian and Caracalla, and continual habitation and use during late antiquity and the medieval period. Cosa has the typical features of a Roman town, such as a forum, bath, basilica, curia, and even a large temple complex, in addition to an impressive defensive wall. However, scholarship has debated heavily over the state of the site's inhabitation following the third century, and thus, definite dating is murky concerning the state of the settlement and its status during these later periods.

Figure 1: Photo of the Arx, photographed by Mac9, wikimediacommons.org

Figure 2: Aerial view of the forum, photographed by Matt Brennan, cosaexcavations.org



Methods

- The main aspect of the research project was cataloging and identifying coins from past excavations in the 1980 "Cosa: The Coins" and the 2003 "Cosa V: An Intermittent Town..." publications and matching the specimens and their information with inventory numbers in the project Excel spreadsheet. In this spreadsheet, each coin was listed with its corresponding inventory number, such as "C" or "CG," and included details regarding its mint, date, and other features on the obverse and reverse of the coins, et cetera.
- Any missing information was duly filled in, and each coin type's reference number was also included. Following this, coins from the third century CE, encompassing forty-five individuals, were selected.
- The coins chosen from this overarching spreadsheet were plotted in an AutoCAD drawing and map. This map was then created utilizing multiple site maps and other plans and drawings from the material beginning with the "Cosa I" publication until the most recent site rendering created in 2019, providing an accurate site visualization.
- Furthermore, each coin was placed in its corresponding location using the find spots provided by Buttrey's and Fentress' publications and cross-referenced with the plans from the legacy publications and excavations. As for coins that could not be accurately placed on the map, they were situated in the general area of their find spot, and orange was used for their marker.
- The finalized AutoCAD drawing of the site was then used to compare the coin's locations to Cosa's structures and urban layout.

Conclusion

The third-century coins found from the excavations at Cosa from 1948-1997 reveal measurable and active inhabitation at the settlement during great turbulence in the Roman Empire. Out of 45 3rd-century coins found across the site, most were primarily located in the structure known as Atrium Building 1 and other surrounding structures in the forum, such as the *mithraeum*, Temple B, and *comitium*. The coins in the forum constituted 37 of the 45 third-century coins from the legacy excavations, an incredibly high percentage of the total. This indicates, at the bare minimum, some level of traffic and presence in the forum, specifically towards the western end and its buildings. Outside the forum, a few coins were found in the Skeleton House (Sunny House), across the various streets in the settlement, and in the main temple in the Arx. Thus, considering these findings, in combination with other evidence such as third-century pottery, the town was still very much in use and active in economic activity and retained a level of visible habitation during the 3rd century, albeit less than in previous periods. This contradicts the established notion from early academic analyses of Cosa. In addition, it is noteworthy to reference coins found from different periods; finds from the second century numbered 69 to 71, and 4th-century coins, of which 101 were found in conjunction with 94 4th/5th-century coins. All this revealed a small dip in coin finds that rose again beginning in the 4th century. Contextualizing this information is key to understanding the function and dynamic of Cosa in the third century CE and analyzing the shift and evolution of the site during the onset of late antiquity. The site was still capable of economic activity and output, primarily focused in and around the forum, with examples found scattered throughout the urban fabric, denoting a continued use of other peripheral areas. In all, the analysis of these 45 coins sets the stage for future study of a much larger sample size of not only coins from the 3rd century but the entire numismatic corpus of Cosa to see the distribution of coinage over time and allow for an investigation more conducive to demonstrating trends and changes throughout its occupation.

Results

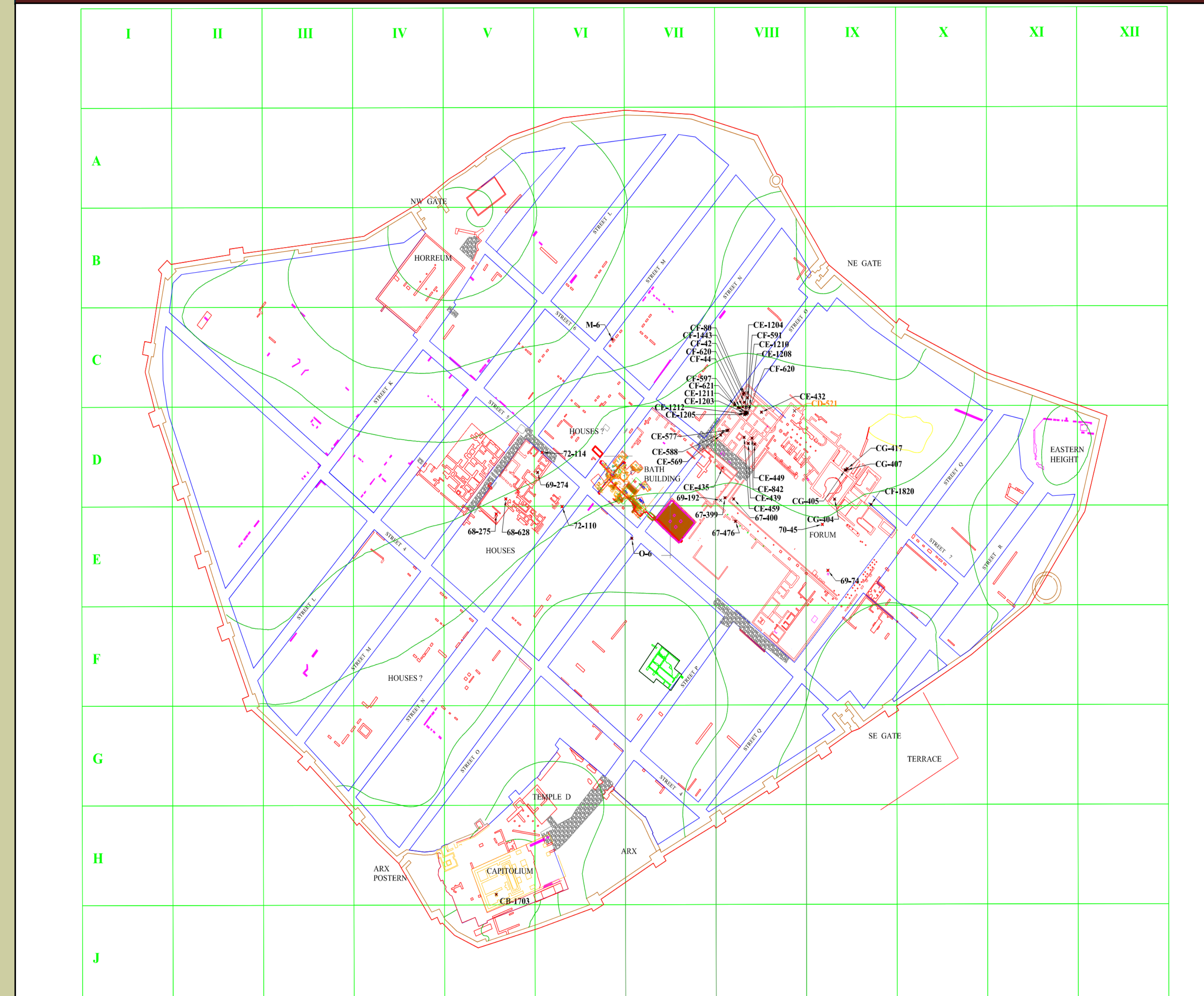


Figure 3: AutoCAD drawing of the entire site of Cosa with architectural features in addition to each 3rd Century Coin placed and labeled accordingly

Acknowledgements & References

I want to thank Melissa Ludke for allowing me to participate in and assist with her project and see the world of numismatics in a new light, as well as Dr. Andrea De Giorgi, the director of Cosa Excavations.

References

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