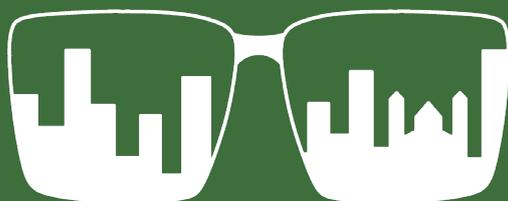


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INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COLLECTIVITY: BUILT HERITAGE AND SERVICE PLANNING IN THE CITY

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ABSTRACT

The paper proposes a reflection on the potentialities of the existing ecclesiastical heritage in the urban context – with particular reference to the one related to the catholic “parish complexes” –. The research introduces a reading of such particular heritage, with the aim of valorizing and innovating its system – widespread and diffused in the Italian cities – which is passing through a phase of reconsideration and regeneration, due to the changing of cultural and social needs of the multicultural citizen. The objectives of the research lie in the elaboration of tools and methods for the analysis and the re-signification of the parish heritage, this one conceived as a potential actor in the “collective services” supply chain of the “public” city.

The research uses the city of Milan as a privileged area of study, by virtue of the diffusion and capillarity of the heritage, the consolidated social and cultural tradition linked to it, as well as the degrees of innovation and experimentation in progress regarding the “subsidiary” planning of services.

The results of the research consist, initially, in a “systematization” of the contribution of different disciplines on the specific topic; secondly, they represent an analytic study about the context of Milan, supported by a multiple-case study analysis, framing some hints of innovation related to users, services,

spaces and management of the parish heritage.

KEYWORDS

Infrastructure; ecclesiastical heritage; service planning; social innovation; urban planning.

INTRODUCTION

This contribution proposes a reflection on the role of built heritage within urban planning of services in the contemporary city, with particular reference to the ecclesiastical one. The considered field of study presents great chances to reinterpret new spatialities and to meet the material and immaterial needs of contemporary society, offering spaces and opportunities for experimentation and innovation. The object of the research refers to the so-called “parish complexes”¹ – specifically developed and spread in the Italian context – which include the Catholic worship building and all the structures attached or aggregated to it, devoted to social, entertainment and educational activities – such as Christian initiation, hospitality, sports and games, charity and assistance initiatives – and several other functions, recently being re-defined². Together with the rest of the ecclesiastical heritage of other natures, it constitutes a huge part of

¹ By “parish complex” it is meant a complex building organism, which belongs to a specific “parish”: a “community of faithful that is established permanently within a particular Church” and which includes the faithful of a specific territory (can. 515, can. 518, Codice di Diritto Canonico, 1983).

² The role of the parochial institution in the Italian society has been consolidated through centuries, flourishing under the inputs of priests and educators (San Filippo Neri in Rome in the XVI century, the great Lombardy bishops from Carlo Borromeo –XVI century– to Giovanni Battista Montini –XX century–, Don Bosco in Turin in the XIX century). After the Unity of Italy and especially during the XIX-XX century the parish consolidated as the social heart of the cities and districts, devoted to young people and their entertainment and education (Borzomati 1997, Tassani 1997).

the entire built heritage of Italian cities, it is deeply rooted in the urban fabric of the main cities, as well as in rural territories, and it traditionally constitutes an identity symbol for cities, neighborhoods, countries, and villages. From a social point of view, these complexes are involved – like many others with a “collective” vocation – in a process of transformation and reconsideration of their vocation and identity due, among other factors, to the changes in religious, social, and cultural trends and needs of the multiethnic city. From a “physical” point of view, the real consistency of the heritage and its potential is greatly under-considered, often under-maintained, under-valued, and partially under-used; moreover, it has different spaces which are not adequate to the needs of the contemporary Christian community and civil society, and which are awaiting for a necessary updating. This observation is linked to the increasingly urgent need to enhance and re-use the built heritage of existing “containers”, avoiding the consumption of soil. Moving from these considerations, the research focused on the definition of the “role” and the “potential” of this huge heritage in the contemporary city, with particular reference to the system of “collective services” and “welfare”.

1. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The general objective of the research is to provide strategies, indications, and perspectives for the enhancement and optimization of this heritage, with the purpose of its integration in the “collective services” planning. The specific objectives of this reflection lie, firstly, in the analysis of the relationship between the system of parish complexes and the contemporary city, and of the consistency and quality of the heritage itself – which is barely examined today –; moreover they consist in the definition of

some scenarios that suggest an innovative articulation of spaces, services and management methods for such complexes.

1.1 Selection of a study area: the city of Milan

Moving from the assumption that the parish heritage has a particular impact and relevance within the Italian panorama, a specific territorial area has been selected, to link the “physical” and architectural analysis of the structures with the urban development and the social impact of parish complexes in a specific context. The city of Milan has been selected, because of the significant number of structures present and the development of the parochial institution which differentiates the identity of the Ambrosian system from the others; moreover, for the wealth of researches and reflections on the topic from an urban, sociological, educational, and religious point of view.

1.2 Phases, methods and tools of the research

The research is articulated into three main phases.

PHASE I | theoretical: the goal lies in the reconstruction of the interactions between the ecclesiastical heritage and the contemporary city. The composition of the theoretical framework (State of the Art) is based on a bibliographical survey related to two main areas: the enhancement of the ecclesiastical heritage and the planning of urban collective services.

PHASE II | analytical: the second phase looks for the qualities and characteristics of these complexes and their relationship with the territory, analyzing their distribution and their “location” within the current “tools” of urban planning, and taking a “photograph” of their status in the Ambrosian city. It consists of a reflection on the territorial organization of

the “public city” and the “ecclesiastical city”, and of a multiple-case study analysis on 15 Milanese parishes. The research methods used range from bibliographic, cartographic, and archival one, direct analysis and statistics tools, supported by the use of geolocation and digital cartography tools, which act as a basis for the various reflections conducted.

PHASE III | strategic: the third phase synthetically elaborates some “profiles” of innovation for the “parishes of the future”, based on the data collected in the previous part and a further bibliographic survey on some specific topics.

2. REFERENCE FRAMEWORK: ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE AND “COLLECTIVE SERVICES”

2.1. Welfare, urban service planning, and subsidiarity in the contemporary city

The relationship between welfare and urban structure is the subject of various innovations, conducted through research and design, and it is particularly lively in the Milan area (Pomilio 2009). The places and “containers” for “collective services” are slowly moving from a “standard” vision to a “horizontal subsidiarity” one; the “public city” is no longer defined by the application of abstract urban constraints, but by the definition of a daily and continuous project of the urban welfare system, in which social activation is possible, and alternative forms of services supply are implemented. Such a process involves not only the “public” actor but also other “subsidiary” entities, including private ones, volunteering, and the third sector (Vittadini 2007). In this sense, the concept of “public service” is extended to all which appears to be “of collective interest” and which responds to a general need: the actual “collective equipment” (Aymonino 2000, Valente 2009). Such principles are the basis of service planning

in some recent Regulatory Plans – including the Milan one – where the municipality plays a supporting and coordinating role in soliciting the potential availability of the subjects active in urban transformations, and which are capable of directly generating services in the urban fabric (Vittadini 2007, Pomilio 2009, Comune di Milano 2019c). The subsidiary perspective, therefore, becomes a potential tool to respond to the multiple changing needs of contemporary living, due to a “cognitive advantage” of individuals and social realities that allows them to respond more appropriately to local needs, compared to public bodies (Garrone and Lauro 2012).

2.2 Built and cultural ecclesiastical heritage: conservation, enhancement, and digitisation

The ecclesiastical heritage – considered firstly as “cultural heritage” – represents a large part of the entire heritage of the territories and for this reason the reflections on it should be strictly connected to the panorama of researches and policies regarding conservation and enhancement of built heritage in Europe. Such frame passed from a concept of mere “conservation” of property to visions that include the development and enhancement of the “outstanding value” heritage of collective interest, involving socio-economic implications, values, and environmental factors (CHCfE 2015, Pontificium Consilium de Cultura 2018, Commissione Europea 2019). In this context, ecclesiastical and religious assets play a highly relevant role, since they represent a real “portion of culture” or “cultural identity” of a specific society and regions (Zetti 2010, 234, Cavana 2016, 46), elements of “cultural identification” and social aggregation (Pontificium Consilium de Cultura 2018, 4). Nonetheless, religious heritage is often subject to a lack of systemic attention and, consequently, of strategic planning for its conservation and enhancement (Stovel et al 2005, CEI & MIBACT 2014). In recent years,

particular attention has been paid to the issue of digitisation and online accessibility of cultural heritage in Europe and Italy (European Commission 2011, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri 2015, Commissione Europea 2019). Also on the ecclesiastical side, several efforts have been carried out in this direction, to “census” and “catalogue” the heritage (D’Agnelli and Gavazzi 2007, Bartolomei 2016): the first step towards a generation of “common good”, proposing the vision of a widespread and integrated heritage and new relationships between the Church and the territories (Hesse and Ostrom 2007, Rizzo and Rizzo 2015, Bartolomei 2016). In this panorama, the *Diocesi di Milano*³ has recently undertaken the project of a management tool integrated with the geolocation of the parish buildings and their territorial boundaries (*Fascicolo Tecnico del Fabbriato e Piano di Manutenzione Programmata della Diocesi di Milano*). The geolocation process aims to anchor the management of the properties to the territorial specificities and local needs and it allows a “complete” and “territorial” reading of the properties, going towards a systemic and complementary conception of spaces, functions, and actions (Guzzetti et al. 2016).

3. ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE AND CONTEMPORARY CITY: THE AMBROSIAN SYSTEM

3.1 Public/ecclesiastical city

From an urban planning point of view, the heritage considered finds a precise “space” within the revision of the *Piano di Governo del Territorio* (Territory Government Plan) of 2012 “Milano 2030”, approved in March 2019,

within the *Piano per le Attrezzature Religiose* (Plan for Religious Equipment, hereinafter PAR), which maps the existing equipment and identifies the areas for those of new forecast. The PAR, created to respond to a legislative requirement (LR/2015) is part of a broader reflection on the urban service planning, where “religious equipment” is considered a real “service” for the multicultural citizen, to be included in the frame of “proximity services” (Comune di Milano 2019b, 19). Nowadays, the planning of the Milanese city and its services is closely linked to the definition of the 88 *Nuclei di Identità Locale* (hereinafter NIL): territorial, non-administrative entities, which arose as modalities of “planning at the local scale” (Pomilio 2009). On the other hand, the “ecclesiastical city” system is organized into 170 “parishes” and 10 Pastoral Units⁴: an organization resulting from historic stratifications and urbanization trends, which led the religious planning to follow the urban one, conceiving churches and parishes as hearts of the new urban districts⁵. The actual PAR shows that, in a certain sense, the development of the “ecclesiastical” city continues to follow urban planning, including the construction of new buildings for worship in the areas of future development. Nonetheless they follow different logics, recalling, on one side (the public), the identities of the NIL – which do not correspond, at a territorial level, to the historical division of the neighborhoods – and on the other side (the ecclesiastical) the unification of parishes – due to a lack of priests and resources –, which generates new territorial identities. An overlapped map of the two nets shows how much they are no longer coincident (Fig. 1, 2). The maps – processed through GIS tools – open up a reflection on the real meaning of the parochial borders and the NILs, and on the real “territorial incidence” of this secular institution – the

³ The *Diocesi di Milano* represents the territorial extension of the Church of Milan and it includes the provinces of Milan, Varese and Lecco, Monza-Brianza, part of that of Como and some municipalities in the provinces of Bergamo and Pavia. It is composed of 1107 parishes, distributed in 73 deaneries, organized in 7 pastoral areas.

⁴ By Pastoral Unit is meant a union of several previous parishes, with the creation of a new institutional figure, or a close coordination between parishes (Bressan 2007, 428).

⁵ Outstanding, in this sense, are the XIX experiences of Bologna and Milan, where the Church worked in strict connection with the public administration to build modern parish complexes in the popular residential districts (Gresleri et al 2004, Lazzaroni 2014).

parish – concerning the development and planning of the contemporary city.

This consideration is fundamental to analyze the potential of the parish heritage as a “container” of services – whose “territoriality” defines its use and users – and its inclusion within the “Piano dei Servizi”. The mentioned reflections about the interaction parish services-neighborhood act a relevant role in the strengthening of the local identities and in the plan of a “systemic” offer of collective-interest services, as well as in the renewal and reorganization of the ecclesiastical fabric.

or laypeople), the collection of technical drawings and urban indications regarding each complex, and the data analysis. The choice of the sample used⁶ aimed at building a vision as articulated as possible, trying to intercept realities and experiences that could be representative of common trends.

The analysis focused, in particular, on the “spaces” and “services” offered by the parishes considered, to outline a comparative framework useful for subsequent analyses. A second objective lies in the will of studying the relationship between the parish and its neighborhood, to describe their

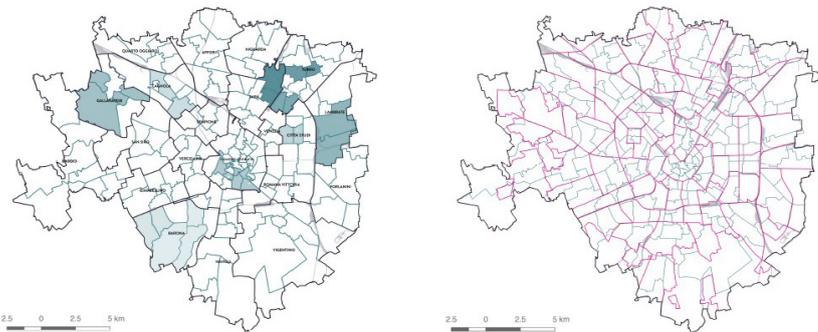


Figure 1, 2. From left: Map of the parishes and Pastoral Unities, City of Milan; Map of the overlapping of the parish network (green) and the NIL one (magenta), City of Milan. Edited by the author.

3.2 The ambrosian parish complexes: a sample analysis

The second part of the analytical phase aimed at taking a photograph of the current state of the analyzed system. A multiple-case study analysis has been conducted on 15 parish complexes, articulated into different phases: a direct observation – to collect qualitative and quantitative data – some interviews with parish interlocutors (priests

interconnections at a territorial (“consistency” of the parish area compared to the one of the related NIL), functional (analysis of services related to those present in the neighborhood) and social level (analysis of users involved in parish activities concerning the demographic composition of the neighborhood).

The data collection about uses and users has revealed that – in most cases – the juvenile users are predominant – regardless of the location of the parish – and that, consequently,

⁶ The choice of the structures followed four selection criteria: I. AffERENCE to non-homogeneous territorial portions; II. Pastoral and social interest; III. Availability of existing data or their direct collection; VI. Historical and “typological” variety of the analyzed complexes. To give a systematic order to the collection, the city of Milan was therefore divided into three areas: “fascia centrale” (central belt), “fascia intermedia” (intermediate belt), and “fascia periferica” (peripheral belt), selecting five parishes for each area. Here the list: San Simeone, San Lorenzo Maggiore, Santa Maria della Passione, Santa Maria al Paradiso, San Francesco d’Assisi al Foppolino (Fascia Centrale); Sant’Ildefonso, San Pio X, San Vincenzo de’ Paoli, San Nicola in Dergano, Sant’Agostino (Fascia Intermedia); Santa Maria Rossa in Crescenzago, Santa Maria Liberatrice, Pentecoste, San Carlo alla Ca’ Granda, Beata Vergine Assunta in Bruzzano (Fascia Periferica).

the services and activities addressed to young people are still predominant. Sports activity proves to be the main constant in the parish offer, following the activities of *oratorio* (traditional aggregative moments of play and free time entertainment) and Christian Initiation. The analyses also show that there is still a strong “celebratory” use of parishes as a “service” which, even today, is attended by several hundred people in each church. Further analyses showed the spatial and functional articulation of the complex, highlighting the differences between “historical” and “modern” heritage: the first, characterized by a spatial predominance of the church-building, which constitutes a strong artistic and cultural value; the second, defined by a balance of sacred and profane spaces. It has also been observed that the architectural and morph-typological attributes of the complexes act a relevant role in the definition of its uses and impact

in the districts; this aspect deserves further investigations that have not been deeply conducted during the research. The analyses deriving from the comparison between the parish and the local contexts revealed of particular interest. From a socio-demographic point of view it showed that considering the entire population living in the parish area, the participation in parish activities, in the majority of cases, involves no more than 20% of the inhabitants of the district; whereas the “incidence” of activities dedicated to young people is significantly higher: in most cases, parishes involve more than 30% of young people in the neighborhoods, reaching peaks of 60-70%. From a spatial point of view, the analysis showed a variety of different relations parish-NIL (i.e. parishes entirely covering the NIL area, and others whose area is not possible to relate with the NIL one).

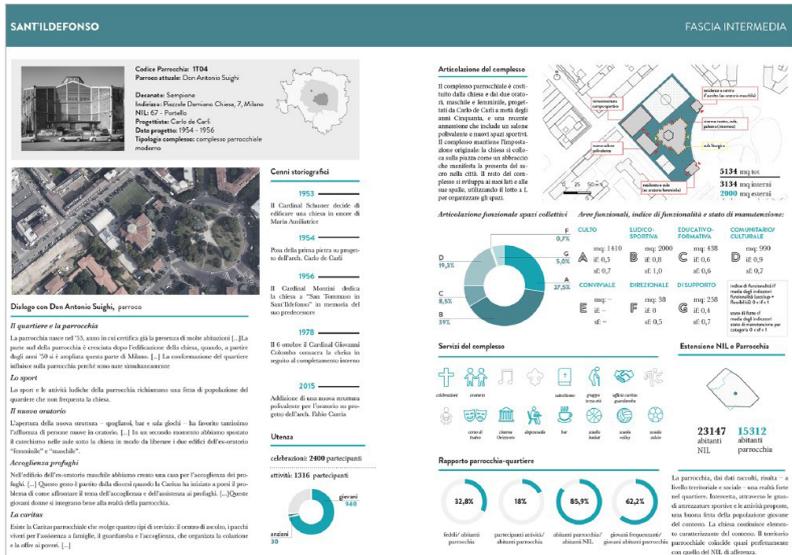


Figure 3. Example of the datasheet of one parish (Sant'Ildefonso), organized in: main information about the complex; aerial view of the complex; excerpts of the dialogues with the parochial interlocutors; brief historiography of the parish; users; functional articulation; index of functionality and state of maintenance for each functional area, services of the complex; overlapped map of NIL extension and parish area; indicators of parish - neighborhood relationship.

Those spatial relations could constitute a basis for a reflection regarding the parochial and public organization, to understand which are the most correct ways to foster a relationship between parishes and neighborhoods. For example, a brief reflection on the historic center situation could lead to the idea of stop concentrating on a resident-based and youth offer – because of its depopulation and inhabitants’ ageing – and looking for new ways of “serving” the district and its users. In this sense, the constant social observation related to the NIL is a powerful tool to collect information about a specific area, moreover, participatory processes are recommended to involve the population in the possible transformations⁷.

In conclusion, the analyses carried out give an image of the Milanese parish reality which, in general, constitutes an active “presence” in the neighborhoods in virtue of the spaces, the services offered and the users – with particular reference to the youth bracket –. Nonetheless, it is not always able to respond to the social need of the contexts of its competence, as well as to adapt the traditional services and activities to the changing demands and citizens’ needs (i.e. consider the sports trends). Moreover, it is equipped with spaces that diverge from the current demand of contemporary users, who increasingly need and prefer flexible places and spaces for meeting and aggregation.

4. ECCLESIASTICAL HERITAGE, PUBLIC CITY, AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

Throughout history, the parish has been able to respond to the needs of the society it knew and supported, varying over time its “offer” of services and activities, and facing the different pastoral and social pressures. Regarding these issues, when related and integrated with the offer of public and social services in the city,

it represents a relevant player in the city’s welfare network in response to social needs still unresolved or poorly resolved, establishing what can be expressed as “creative subsidiarity” (Cottino and Zeppetella 2009). Parish spaces, moreover, offer themselves as truly significant potential spaces, given their intrinsic openness to the territory and their use – in most cases, partial, or at least concentrated in certain time slots and days of the week –. In terms of innovation, this heritage reveals to have spaces available to fight the “individualizing trend” of society (Bauman 2002).

In this sense, its enhancement as an under-used resource, linked to its potential of new actors, networks, and relationships involvement and activation, makes the parish a field of action of great interest in the development of Social Innovation actions.

Concerning its users, the parish should act towards a multi-generational and supra-territorial perspective

– thus expanding its catchment area –, designing its spaces and services to meet the needs of the context and not only of the traditional parochial “sphere”.

For what concerns the services offered, the analysis showed a particular incidence of the sports services held in the parish complexes. Given their widespread presence (more than two thousand structures on the Lombard territory), and their physical structure (which includes, within a single complex, indoor and outdoor spaces for sports – e.g. fields, gyms – and semi-public spaces for meeting with the city – e.g. courtyards and parvis –) the parishes constitute a real opportunity to respond to the increased demand for spaces and services intended for physical and sports activities, with particular reference to the lack of “widespread services” for the practice of emerging urban sports, which require an adaptation of traditional sports venues (Vettori 2019, Ghiretti 2019).

⁷ During the last years, the Italian Bishops’ Conference (CEI) started interesting experimentations about the participatory processes in the design and renewal of parish complexes, intending to guarantee a recognized role to the communities – both religious and civil – in the design process, including the record of the needs and expectations of people in the Preliminary Document for the Design of new churches (DPP). (Cavallini, Daprà and De Lucia 2019).

An example of such a transformation process could be given by the parish of San Pio X in Città Studi: a parish complex in strict relation with the university users and life which started, during the last years, to open its spaces to study in the morning. A community-based survey, conducted in 2019, demonstrated how the parish and its spaces are mainly used by district-users to study, to meet, and to socialize, a totally different asset from the resident-based frequentation of the majority of the parishes. Such inputs led the parish to start a process of reconsideration of its role, aiming to restore both the church building and the sports structures in an innovative way (Daprà 2020). Finally, wide margins of innovation reside in the ways of providing services. The parochial services, when correctly inserted in the *Piano dei Servizi* (implementing, for example, an ad hoc voice to reflect the plurality and versatility of the types of services provided by these structures) and organized systemically – also through their digitisation – would constitute real “nodes” of a “subsidiary infrastructure” of services.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research attempted to analyze the implications of the huge parish church heritage in the contemporary city. The

analysis of the urban structure of the “public city” superimposed on the “ecclesiastical city” has shown how two “realities”, which co-exist, could reveal the great potential for the territory and citizens if properly systematized. The systemic analysis of the physical consistency of the heritage, combined with that of its spaces and services concerning the neighborhoods of reference, constitutes an innovative vision of the topic, from which broad reflections on the role of the parish heritage as a “common good” to be revitalized can derive. As a matter of fact, some services provided by Christian communities have always been considered of public interest (such as amateur sports); whereas, today, it is necessary to reflect on the fact that the whole – by its widespread presence within the neighborhoods and its symbolic power (physical and cultural) in the urban landscape – represents a great potential as a “provider” of services to be enhanced and to be integrated into the public system.

The reflection on the parish’s degrees of innovation in terms of users, services and methods, has shown that it is desirable an even greater interference and interpolation between the two institutions, to enhance and exploit both the physical heritage and the vocation of the parochial institution. The research led only a first small step towards considering the urban, social, and real estate potential of the heritage considered, waiting for further deepening on it.

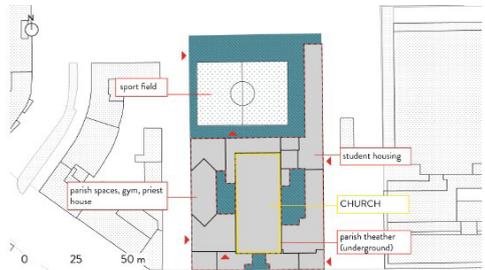
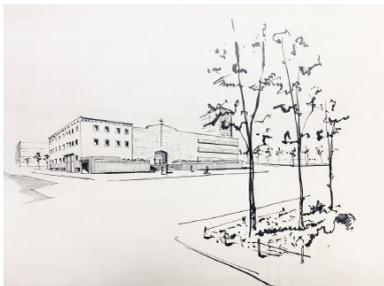


Figure 4, 5. The parish of San Pio X in Città Studi. From left: view from Piazza Leonardo da' Vinci, Giuseppe Chinigher architect, 1954. Source: Giuseppe Chinigher Archive, Politecnico di Milano; current planimetric configuration of the parish, edited by the author.

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