

## **GORONTALO TRADITION OF MOLOBUNGA YILİYALA: CULTURAL AND ISLAMIC LAW PERSPECTIVES**

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### **Abstract**

This study delves into the Gorontalo tradition of *Molobunga Yiliyala*, which pertains to the burial of the placenta, from both cultural and Islamic law perspectives. The cultural viewpoint is garnered through interviews with a customary leader, while the Islamic legal perspective is acquired through consultations with a religious figure. In addition to interviews, observations, and document analyses were employed as methodological tools. The research elucidates a symbiotic relationship between culture and religion, epitomized by the principal

figures overseeing the *Molobunga Yiliyala* ritual: the *Hulango* (customary leader) and the *Imamu* or *Hatibi* (religious figure). Culturally, the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition is replete with profound symbolic meanings. This tradition is predicated on humanitarian considerations, as the *Yiliyala* (placenta) is recognized as a part of the human body deserving reverence. Consequently, it is ceremonially cleansed, shrouded, buried, and accompanied by post-burial prayers. Based on the perspective of *maqâshid al-syari'ah*, the *Molobunga Yiliyala* ritual embodies an actionable manifestation of environmental cleanliness. The *Molobunga Yiliyala* is deemed sunnah or encouraged in alignment with Islamic jurisprudential principles. As a result, the tradition of *Molobunga Yiliyala* is categorized as a part of the *'urf* or customary practices within the epistemological paradigm of Islamic law. Each phase of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* ritual highlights the intricate acculturation of Islam with the indigenous Gorontalo culture.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Islamic Law, Molobunga Yiliyala.*

## A. Introduction

In Indonesian customs, the placenta has an important and respected social standing. This reverence stems from the recognition of the placenta as the sole source of nourishment for the fetus during its intrauterine development (Burton & Jauniaux, 2015; Macnab, 2022). The act of planting or burying (Manan, 2021; Yamachika, 2010) represents one of the manifestations of reverence and homage towards the placenta, ceremonially conducted through a ritual known as "*Puhutu Molobunga Yiliyala*" in the local Gorontalo tradition. The study of this ritual holds particular interest due to its unique characteristics compared to other archipelago regions. In Madura, a similar tradition is recognized by the name "*ngobur tamoni*." The Madurese community observes the tradition of "*ngobur tamoni*" based on the belief that the placenta is regarded as a sibling to their newborn, having nurtured and accompanied the infant throughout its development, warranting

special treatment. This distinctive treatment takes the form of a ceremonial burial, accompanied by prayers and parental supplications to the Divine, seeking blessings and well-being for their child (Abidin, 2014). The perception of the placenta as a sibling to the infant is a common belief shared across regions that adhere to the tradition of placental burial (Abidin, 2014). Meanwhile, the Gorontalo community regards the placenta as the “elder sibling” of the baby and treats it with a humane disposition. Consequently, the burial process resembles that of a human, involving cleansing, wrapping in white cloth, and interment. Conversely, among the Javanese, Banjar, Palembang, Talang Gading, and generally in Java, the placenta is washed and buried along with various accompanying items. In the case of the Javanese and Banjar communities, these items may include books, needles, and offerings such as sugar, salt, and others (Cahyani & Nur, 2023). In Talang Gading, items such as pencils, white paper, various flowers, mirrors, powder, needles and thread, shallots, and red chili are included in the burial ritual. In the city of Surakarta, articles such as notebooks, pencils, needles, thread, and pins are part of the tradition. However, in Gorontalo, the practice does not involve the inclusion of additional objects (Hisaan, 2019).

Another distinction lies in the execution of the ceremony and the burial site for the placenta. In Talang Gading, the placenta is interred beneath or near a coconut tree, with the aspiration that the child may grow tall and bring forth numerous benefits (Purwadi, 2006). On the island of Java, particularly in areas traversed by the flow of the Solo River, the placenta is ceremoniously carried away using a vessel filled with rice (*Oryza sativa*) and turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). The addition of rice and turmeric serves as provisions for the placenta, symbolizing its role as a perceived sibling to

the newborn (Syaffa Al Liina et al., 2018). Meanwhile, the placenta is buried beneath a tree in Gorontalo, typically positioned under a bedroom window and illuminated by a lamp for seven days. The ceremonial execution of the placental burial is typically performed by the father, akin to the customs observed among the Dayak Meratus community in South Kalimantan (Sanjaya et al., 2016), Aceh (Nurul, 2023), Surakarta (Hisaan, 2019), Talanggading (Petir, 2014) and Bone (Petir, 2014). In the context of Bone, it is necessary for the father to be groomed in a certain manner. In Talang Gading, it is sufficient for him to cleanse himself through bathing, performing ablution (wudhu), and donning clean clothes. Meanwhile, in Gorontalo, the individual responsible for burying the placenta is a religious figure known as an *Imamu* or *Hatibi*, along with an accompanying *Hulango* (Daulima & Botutihe, n.d.). *Hulango* is a designation for a middle-aged woman who possesses an intricate understanding of traditions, encompassing the procedural aspects, ceremonial etiquettes, and spoken expressions integral to each ritual, as well as detailed knowledge concerning the objects or materials prepared and utilized in every customary ceremony or tradition. Consequently, the criteria for a “Hulango” are grounded in knowledge and experience (Daulima, 2006). The primary responsibility of the *Hulango* in the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition is to prepare the cultural artifacts and cleanse the *yiliyala* (placenta) using traditional attire. Meanwhile, the Imam or Hatibi is tasked with the burial process and conducting the prayer for well-being (Daulima & Botutihe, n.d.). The involvement of religious figures (Imam or Hatibi) and cultural figures (Hulango) in the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition signifies two essential aspects. Firstly, it underscores the equality between religious and cultural

figures. Secondly, it represents an implementative form of the Gorontalo traditional philosophy: “*adati hula-hula’a to sara’a, sara’a hula-hula’a to quru’ani*” (custom adheres to Islamic law, and Islamic law adheres to the Quran) (Nur, 1979). This traditional philosophy emphasizes the balanced roles of cultural and religious figures in customary ceremonies (pohutu).

Therefore, research on *Puhutu Molobunga Yiliyala* is crucial to demonstrate the existence of a harmonious relationship between religion and culture. The cultural perspective on the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition is undertaken to unveil its intrinsic local values. Meanwhile, the religious perspective on the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition is intended to ensure its alignment with religious legal principles. In order to scrutinize perspectives, a number of in-depth interviews were undertaken with traditional figures, including both those affiliated with the Customary Institution of Gorontalo Regency and City, as well as those who function outside of the formal system. The opinions of these traditional figures are crucial not only as insiders but also as practitioners who comprehend the symbolic meanings of traditions. The religious perspective, specifically within the context of Islamic law, regarding the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition, was obtained through unstructured, in-depth interviews with academics, *Kiai Pesantren* (Islamic scholars or leaders in Islamic Boarding School), the Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*), and *Qadhi* (Islamic judge). The opinions of religious scholars are important from an outsider’s standpoint to ensure the harmony between religion and culture. This is particularly significant given Gorontalo’s cultural philosophy: “*adati hula-hula’a to sara’a, sara’a hula-hula’a to quru’ani*” (Custom adheres to Islamic

law, and Islamic law adheres to the Quran). Moreover, their perspective is essential to demonstrate the accommodation of Islam to Gorontalo's local culture, specifically to ascertain that the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition aligns with Islamic law.

## B. Literature Review

### 'Urf in Islamic Law Context

Etymologically, the term *'urf* is synonymous with the word *'âdah* (custom) (Salisu, 2013) or of similar meaning (al-*'urf wa al-âdah bi ma'nâ wâhid*). It denotes something habituated by the general populace or specific societal groups (Nizhâmuddîn, 1983), manifesting in both words and deeds (Khallâf, 1960). In the Quran, the term *'urf* is mentioned in QS. al-A'raf, (7:199): "Be tolerant and command what is right (*bil 'urfi*) ..." (The Qur'an, 2004). This verse serves as a reference, particularly within the realm of Islamic legal theory (*ushul fiqh*), as a theological argument highlighting Islam's accommodative stance toward tradition and culture (Husein, 2001). The use of the term *al-'urf* in this verse (*bil 'urfi*) specifically points to local traditions or culture, as *al-'urf*, in a literal sense, conveys customs, habits, or culture. According to Imam al-Qarafi (d. 1285 H), based on the textual wording of this verse, any practice acknowledged by custom establishes legal rulings according to its customary norms (Abdullah, 1995).

Among the scholars of exegesis, the term *al-'urf* is interpreted as *al-ma'rûf*, referring to what is perceived as virtuous by the human soul following the dictates of Islamic law and customary practices (al-Zuhailî, 2005). According to al-Râghib al-Ashfahânî (n.d.), *al-ma'rûf* encompasses every

matter or action known by reason and religion to be virtuous. Muhammad Abduh defines *al-ma'rûf* as anything known in human society that is considered good both by reason and sound instincts (Ridhâ, 1973). Ibn Abi Jamrah formulates *al-ma'rûf* as things recognized by religious evidence as good, whether within cultural traditions or otherwise (Abû Jaib, 1992).

Based on these understandings, K.H. Husein Muhammad (born 1953 AD) formulates *al-ma'rûf* as a tradition, habit, and norm prevalent in society. All these are recognized as worthy, under religious teachings, human reason, and human instincts (Husein, 2001). Specifically, *al-ma'rûf* refers to things deemed appropriate and fitting according to the prevailing norms in societal traditions.

The hadith that serves as a theological basis for Islam's accommodation of culture states that "whatever the Muslims deem good is also considered good in the sight of Allah. Conversely, whatever the Muslims deem bad is also considered bad in the sight of Allah" [*mâ raâhu al-muslimûna hasanan fa huwa 'indallâhi hasanun, wa mâ raâhu al-muslimûna qabîhan fa huwa 'indallâhi qabîhun*] (al-Thabrânî, 1994a). According to Muhammad Abu Zahrah (d. 1974 AD), this hadith, both in its wording and intent, indicates that any matter that has become a tradition among Muslims and is regarded as good is considered good in the sight of Allah (Abu Zahrah, 2011a).

In the terminology of Islamic jurisprudence scholars, a good tradition is termed *al-'urf al-shahîh*, referring to customs prevailing in society that do not contradict the explicit texts (al-Quran and al-Sunnah), do not permit the forbidden, do not abrogate obligations, do not eliminate benefits, and do not bring harm to society. Conversely, customs that conflict with Sharia law, such as permitting the forbidden or abrogating obligations, are referred to as *al-'urf al-fâsid* (Khallâf, 1978). Therefore, the majority

of Islamic jurisprudence experts (fuqaha) agree that a valid *urf* can serve as legal evidence as long as it does not undermine the fundamental principles of the religion, as formulated in the legal maxim *al-âdatu al-muhakkamah* (custom as the basis for legal determination) (al-Zarqâ, 1989). This principle indicates that custom or tradition can be a legal reference as long as it meets certain criteria. Syafe'i (2008) identifies six criteria: Complying with Sharia law; Not causing harm and eliminating benefits; Being prevalent among Muslims in general; Not applying to purely ritual worship; Already being established in society when its legal status is determined; and not conflicting with explicit statements.

### **The Notion of *Molobunga Yilala* as A Local Tradition**

The study on *Molobunga Yiliyala* in Gorontalo remains relatively underexplored. Based on the literature identification, only one research study has been identified, namely the work by Muh. Rusli entitled "*Sinergitas Islam dan Budaya dalam Kearifan Lokal: Studi Adat Molobunga Yiliyala di Gorontalo.*" This study elucidates the synergy between Islam and the local Gorontalo culture within the context of *Molobunga Yiliyala*. Such synergy is manifested in the values embedded within the symbols and processes associated with the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition. These values encompass sanctity, profound appreciation for the perfection of human creation processes, aspirations for virtuous conduct (*akhlâq al-karîmah*), reverence for all of Allah creations, respect for brotherhood, environmental cleanliness, and the divine oversight of Allah (Rusli, 2020). While this work materially aligns with the present author's discourse on the "*Molobunga Yiliyala*" tradition, a distinct formal focus exists between the two. Muh. Rusli's formal object in research focuses on



the synergy between Islam and local culture. In contrast, the formal object of this current research is centered on the perspectives of both cultural and Islamic legal dimensions.

Sofyan A.P. Kau addresses the same material object through *Akulturasi Islam dan Budaya Lokal: Studi Islam tentang Ritus-Ritus Kehidupan dalam Tradisi Lokal Muslim Gorontalo* (Kau, 2018), and *Islam dan Budaya Lokal Adat Gorontalo: Makna Filosofis, Normatif, Edukatif dan Gender* (Kau, 2020a). These books are adapted from previous research examining twelve local traditions of Gorontalo. The *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition is merely one component of the local traditions associated with the life cycle. However, the formal objects differ between the two. The first book addresses the twelve local Gorontalo traditions from an Islamic studies perspective, while the second book delves into the Philosophical, Normative, Educational, and Gender aspects. Neither book examines the “*Molobunga Yiliyala*” tradition from the dual perspectives of Gorontalo culture and Islamic law. Therefore, these distinctive formal object characteristics set them apart from previous literature and have become a novelty in the research.

### **C. Research Method**

This research employs a descriptive research method accompanied by qualitative data analysis. The data, obtained in the form of qualitative information articulated through words, is acquired firsthand through observations of the research subjects. The data collection techniques employed encompass observation, documentation, and interviews. In-depth, unstructured interviews were conducted with customary leaders, both those within the institutional structure of the Gorontalo Customary Institution and those outside it.

Religious figures, including Islamic boarding school leaders or scholars (Kiai of Pesantren) in Gorontalo, the Chairman of the MUI of Gorontalo, and the *Qadhi* (Islamic judge) of Gorontalo, as well as faculty members from IAIN (State Islamic Institute, *Institut Agama Islam Negeri*) Gorontalo knowledgeable about the research material, were also interviewed.

Documentary analysis was undertaken by examining books concerning Gorontalo customs and Islamic law pertinent to the issues surrounding “*Molobunga Yiliyala*.” Concurrently, observational methods were utilized to directly observe the implementation of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* ritual. Additionally, data were sourced from journal articles, books, and other academic research findings related to the research theme.

## **D. Findings and Discussion**

### **1. Implementation Process of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* Ceremony**

The implementation process of the “*Molobunga Yiliyala*” ceremony comprises two stages. Firstly, there is the preparation phase. Before the actual “*Molobunga Yiliyala*” ceremony, two aspects are meticulously prepared: materials and the burial site. The materials prepared include white cloth, “*ombulo*” (leaves from the *woka* tree or a similar type of palm), coconut shells (which are thoroughly cleaned both inside and out and used to cover one another), “*limututu*” (lime), “*lotingo*” (vinegar), and “*mato lo umonu*” (core fragrances) (Lihawa, 2014). Additionally, the “*tohetutu*” (traditional oil lamp) is included. These nine items are referred to as customary objects utilized in the burial ceremony for the placenta, known as “*Molobunga Yiliyala*.” The white cloth is employed to wrap the “*yiliyala*” (placenta), measuring one meter without any

edges. The “*ombulo*” is used to encase the coconut shell, while “*limu tutu*” and “*lotingo*” serve to eliminate unpleasant odors. “*Mato lo umonu*” and “*dumbaya*” are employed for fragrance purposes, and the “*tohetutu*” is utilized to illuminate the burial site of the “*yiliyala*.”

Regarding the burial site, considerations include both location and dimensions. The criteria for selecting a burial site prioritize safety and accessibility. “Safety” entails protection from waterlogging and being free from animal interference, mainly ant nests. “Accessibility” implies that the burial site is easily identifiable and remembered. Typically, burials occur beneath or near trees, although commonly, they are positioned beside houses under windows. The dimensions of the grave measure 30x40 cm and have a depth of 50 cm. From the excavated base, a piece of soil is extracted, which will be taken home by the *Imamu* and *Hulango* following the burial ceremony.

Secondly, the implementation phase or the ceremonial process of the “*Molobunga Yiliyala*” begins with cleansing the “*yiliyala*” with water. Subsequently, it is infused with “*limu tutu*” and “*lotingo*” to prevent decay and foul odors. The execution of this ritual is entrusted to a *Hulango*, attired in a white *kebaya* and white *batik* as traditional garb. The term “*Hulango*” refers to a middle-aged woman well-versed in the intricacies of tradition. This includes knowledge of the procedural aspects, the specific recitations uttered during each ritual phase, and detailed knowledge about the objects or materials prepared and utilized for each customary ceremony or tradition. Consequently, the criteria defining a *Hulango* are predicated upon knowledge and experience (Daulima & Botutihe, n.d.)

Upon completing the cleansing ritual, the next step involves the shrouding process. Subsequently, the “yiliyala” is wrapped in a small white mat or “permadani” for transportation to the burial site. During this procession, the individual carrying the “yiliyala” proceeds towards the burial ground without glancing to the left or right until reaching the destination. Accompanying the carrier are the *Hulango* and *Imamu*. The *Imamu* is attired in traditional Muslim garb, akin to a “baju koko”, complemented by a “dutongo” (a type of skullcap or hat).

The burial itself is officiated by an *Imamu*. Prior to interment, a prayer of “Adzan” is recited if the “yiliyala” pertains to a male infant, whereas an “iqamah” is intoned if it concerns a female infant. As the “yiliyala” is lowered into the earth, the wrapping *woka* leaf remains upright. The *Imamu* holds his breath during this process until the “yiliyala” is correctly positioned. Subsequently, the *Imamu* articulates the following phrase:

*“Ma popo mulo’u yi’o ta mohula. Wawu dila mayi tombuwata wutatumu lo puyu wawu hiyongo”.*

Meanings:

“I prioritize you, the eldest among siblings. Do not disturb your brethren with cries and lamentations”.

Subsequently, the grave is filled with soil, ensuring that the tip of the *woka* leaf and the white cloth protrude approximately 5 cm above the ground. A stone is carefully placed to mark the site of the burial, while a *bintalo* (a section of a distant plant stem) is put into the soil. The *tohe tutu* resin

light is set up very close to the stone or *bintalo*. The light remains powered constantly, covering seven consecutive days, both during the day and at night.

Upon completing this ritual, the Imamu recites a prayer, expressing hope that the *yiliyala* will be a perpetual reminder to its sibling in the earthly realm. This is following the infant's pledge to Allah to lead a righteous and pious life. Concluding the prayer, the Imamu or the Hulango retrieves a piece of soil from the base of the excavated grave. This soil serves as a symbolic gesture, signifying that the *yiliyala* has preceded the infant. The fragment of soil is gently placed on the infant's forehead (known as *pomontowa*), accompanied by the following recitation:

*“Yi’o ti da’a mohuhula, pata’o ma lowali ta yali-yali. Pilo lahuli mayi lo wutatumu ta mohuhula, dila bolo tono mo’o hiyongo ‘olemu ngopohiya lo’u mohile tutu”.*

Meanings:

“You, initially positioned as the elder sibling, have now assumed the role of the younger. Your elder sibling advises you not to weep except when you feel the need to breastfeed”.

Subsequently, a comprehensive blessing prayer is performed, complete with the requisite prayer apparatus such as the *polutube* (fire vessel), *totabu* (frankincense), and a glass of pure water. The prayer is conducted to seek the well-being of the infant, the mother, the father, and the entire family. Upon the conclusion of the prayer recitation, the married couple offers a charitable donation, given with

sincerity, to the *Imamu, Hulango*, and those who participated in the grave excavation.

## **2. Cultural Perspective: Views of Traditional Figures**

The term *Molobunga Yiliyala* refers to the burial of a baby's placenta. The placenta, also known as the afterbirth, is an essential organ responsible for the nourishment and development of the fetus during gestation. Functionally, it is the intermediary connection between the mother and the fetus through the umbilical cord (Dickinson et al., 2017; Oe et al., 2021). Typically, the placenta attaches to a portion of the uterine wall (Rathbun & Hildebrand, 2020), with most pregnancies showing attachment to the upper segment of the uterus. This organ is crucial in supplying oxygen and nutrients to the infant while facilitating waste disposal (Makarim, 2022). Furthermore, the placenta serves additional critical functions, such as safeguarding the fetus against potential microbial infections and bacteria that could impede its intrauterine development (Arora et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2022). It acts as a barrier, preventing fetal cells from entering the maternal bloodstream, thereby avoiding recognition as foreign entities by the maternal immune system. Additionally, the placenta synthesizes essential pregnancy-supporting hormones (Horikoshi et al., 2003), including Human Placental Lactogen (HPL) (Li et al., 2019), relaxin, oxytocin, progesterone, and estrogen (Kusz et al., 2023; Marshall et al., 2017; Park et al., 2018). Moreover, it facilitates the transfer of maternal antibodies (Albrecht et al., 2022), enhancing the fetal immune system (Hussain et al., 2022), thereby endowing the newborn with innate immunity for approximately the initial three months postpartum (Jennewein et al., 2017).

The significance and functions of the placenta, as delineated above concerning its role for both the expectant mother and fetus, are culturally interpreted within the context of kinship or as a sibling to the infant. The Gorontalo ethnic group does not solely embrace this perspective; it also expands across various cultural contexts (Daulima, 2006). In the Gorontalo cultural context, the placenta (*yiliyala*) is accorded a status akin to that of a human being. Consequently, it is not discarded as waste or floated down rivers but is interred, mirroring the rituals associated with human burial (Lihu, 2021). When an individual passes away, specific rituals are observed, including bathing, shrouding, offering prayers, and burial. Similarly, the placenta undergoes analogous treatment, albeit with distinct procedural nuances. According to Endi Nakii, while a deceased individual is bathed using fig leaves and shrouded with aromatic resin, the placenta is not bathed but instead cleansed. The dead are enshrouded with aromatic balm, whereas the placenta is wrapped in white cloth and sprinkled with *mato lo umano* for fragrance. Notably, unlike the deceased, the placenta does not undergo a ritualistic prayer (*salat*) but is instead offered prayers. Nevertheless, the dead and the placenta are interred following these practices (Nakii, 2019).

According to Kau (2019), the fundamental value underlying the practice of *Molobunga Yiliyala* underscores the humane treatment accorded to a distinct human body part. While it remains conceivable to dispose of the placenta in waste receptacles or cast it adrift in rivers, such actions are deemed useless. Even within the precepts of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the burying of a nail clipping is advocated, let alone the placenta, which has served a pivotal role for both the expectant mother and the fetus. The act of burial, in essence,

signifies reverence for the placenta. This perspective aligns with the norms of Islamic jurisprudence, as articulated by K.H. Abdurrazyid Kamaru, and is consistent with the consensus among scholars who deem it commendable (*sunnah*) to inter the placenta (Kamaru, 2021).

Alim S. Niode further elucidates the cultural and health benefits associated with the burial of the placenta. Discarding the placenta into rivers would contaminate the water sources, compromising environmental integrity. Moreover, improper disposal of it could result in the release of unpleasant odors, hence causing potential health risks to people. Such disposal or casting it into rivers equates to environmental pollution, undermining both hygiene practices and the broader ecological balance (Niode, 2022). Consequently, a convergence emerges between cultural perspectives and religious views regarding the treatment of the placenta.

The humane dimension of *Molobunga Yiliyala* is also evident in its burial location criteria. Three specific criteria dictate the burial site selection: it should not be susceptible to flooding, it must not be traversed by animals, and it should be devoid of ant colonies. According to Alim S. Niode, these criteria encapsulate two moral and humanitarian facets. Firstly, they protect the placenta from disturbances by living creatures, such as animals like dogs, and environmental challenges like water stagnation. This initial moral directive implies that the living should provide comfort and respect to the deceased. The Gorontalo culture underscores the principle that individuals should refrain from disrespecting the dead by recounting their flaws and transgressions. Secondly, these criteria safeguard other creatures from the disturbance caused by the placenta's interment, particularly ants. Burying the placenta in an ant's habitat would disrupt their comfort.



This cultural tenet emphasizes that one's presence should not infringe upon the tranquillity and well-being of others. These location selection criteria propagate a culture of peace and harmonious coexistence among fellow human beings.

Beyond safety considerations regarding burial locations, the selection is also predicated on ease of remembrance. Placing the placenta near or beneath a tree, according to Alim S. Niode, underscores the significance of commemorating the deeds and kindness of others. Trees symbolize gratitude for their fruit-bearing capabilities and the comforting shade they provide. Interment near or beneath a tree serves as a symbolic reminder for individuals, particularly married couples, not to forget their respective roles and responsibilities. Each party has made an equivalent contribution, culminating in the birth of a child. If the placenta, despite its diminutive size, offers significant benefits to both the expectant mother and fetus, then similarly, the marital partners do so through their roles and contributions. The placenta, albeit a small organ, yields immense benefits. This implies that humans inherently contribute to humanity, irrespective of the magnitude of their functions and roles. However, the placenta is conventionally interred adjacent to the domicile, often positioned beneath a window. Lihu (2021) interpreted this practice as symbolizing that the home is the most comforting sanctuary for married couples, reaffirming their domestic unity and refuge.

Utilizing *tohetutu* (traditional oil lamp) both during the day and night over seven days serves as a protective measure for the placenta's burial site. A.W. Lihu interprets this as a protective mechanism, suggesting that these lights dissuade animals, such as dogs, from approaching and excavating the placenta's grave. The depth of the burial, set at 50 cm, is designed to deter easy access by animals. Additionally, it is

sprinkled with aromatic substances like *dumbaya* to prevent odors that might attract animals. According to Alim S. Niode, the use of *tohetutu* carries more profound moral implications. The light's visibility during nighttime signifies a newborn's birth, enabling neighbors to be informed. This symbolic illumination indirectly reminds neighbors to maintain a peaceful environment, refraining from activities that could disrupt the infant's sleep. Essentially, *tohetutu* functions as an indirect means of admonishment. The seven-day duration primarily emphasizes the infant's recent birth, signifying the child is no more than a week old. Endi Nakii posits that the seven-day duration sufficiently informs neighbors about the presence of a newborn within the vicinity (Nakii, 2019). The distinct seven-day duration of continuous illumination through the "tohetutu" predominantly serves an informative rather than theological purpose.

The use of ceremonial elements as informative markers is also evident in the recitation of the *Adzan* and *Iqamah* before the interment of the placenta (*yiliyala*). However, this practice is frequently misinterpreted. In Gorontalo tradition, male infants receive the *Adzan*, while female infants receive the *Iqamah*. Misunderstandings arise from the assumption that male infants are not *Iqamah*-recited at birth and that female infants are not *Adzan*-recited. Contrarily, both male and female infants are *Adzan*-recited in their right ears and *Iqamah*-recited in their left ears. The distinction lies in the execution technique: the *Adzan* for male infants is vocalized audibly or amplified, whereas the *Iqamah* is whispered (*sirri*) to remain inaudible. Conversely, the *Iqamah* is audibly recited or amplified for female infants, while the *Adzan* remains whispered (*sirri*) and thus goes unheard. According to Endi

Nakii, amplifying the *Adzan* for male infants signifies the birth of a male child, while amplifying the *Iqamah* for female infants indicates the birth of a female child (Nakii, 2019).

Upon birth, both male and female infants have recited the *Adzan* and *Iqamah*, and similarly, before their interment upon passing. Given that the placenta (*yiliyala*) is treated with the reverence accorded to a human, it too is *Adzan*-recited and *Iqamah*-recited during its burial rites. The placenta is primarily perceived as being *Adzan*-recited for male infants, although it is, in reality, also *Iqamah*-whispered (inaudible) to signify its origin from a male infant. Conversely, for female infants, the placenta is primarily perceived as being *Iqamah*-recited, while, in essence, it is also *Adzan*-whispered (inaudible) to indicate its origin from a female infant.

The signaling function is discernible through how the placenta (*yiliyala*) is transported to its burial site, notably by deliberately avoiding turning one's head from side to side during its conveyance. This deliberate act of refraining from looking left and right signifies concentration and meticulousness. Such precautions are taken to prevent the potential mishandling or dropping of the placenta, especially given its spherical form and the confines of its container. Endi Nakii contends that this method of conveyance is primarily technical, lacking specific cultural beliefs or myths. Similarly, when the Imam places the placenta into the earth without breathing, not breathing signifies breath retention rather than a spiritual act. Such practices are rooted in technical precision, ensuring the correct and appropriate positioning of the placenta within its container due to its spherical form, necessitating careful handling. Consequently, Endi Nakii emphasizes that these practices are predominantly technical rather than theological (Nakii, 2019).

The utilization of various traditional objects in the "Molobunga Yiliyala" ceremony serves both functional and symbolic purposes. The term "functional" is employed as these objects are utilized by their intended functions. However, the selection of these materials inherently carries symbolic significance. The white cloth enveloping the placenta symbolizes purity. According to Husnun Nizham Kau, the choice of a white fabric is emblematic of the placenta's revered status, described in religious terms as "*dzu mahramin*." Due to its sanctity, the placenta is considered an esteemed part of the human body that warrants burial, albeit its interment procedure differs from that of deceased individuals. Nevertheless, both the placenta and the dead are accorded equal treatment in terms of their burial practices (Kau, 2019). Therefore, Endi Nakii assesses this white cloth as analogous to the burial shroud wrapping the deceased (Nakii, 2019). In other words, if the deceased is shrouded in white fabric, the placenta is wrapped in white cloth. Similarly, when the Gorontalo community conducts funeral rites adorned in white attire, the *Hulango*, or the individual responsible for the cleansing, also dons traditional dress of a white hue (Nakii, 2019).

According to Kali, the *ombulo* (*woka* leaf) and *bu'awu huliliyo* (empty coconut shell) symbolize the responsibility for ensuring the safety of the infant. Functionally, the *ombulo* shields the placenta from animal excavations, while the *bu'awu huliliyo* is the resting place for the placenta. Although the placenta is already enveloped in fragrant white cloth to deter animals, specifically dogs, from detecting it, its safety is further enhanced by placing it within the *bu'awu huliliyo*, subsequently wrapped with the *ombulo*. This layered protection underscores the rigorous measures to ensure the

placenta's safety. If, within the cultural context, the placenta is regarded as a "twin sibling or elder sibling," then the safety of the infant, considered the "younger sibling", is even more rigorously safeguarded. This implies that the protective functions of the *ombulo* and *bu'awu huliliyo* symbolize the husband and wife's joint responsibility in ensuring the infant's safety and comfort.

According to Zainul Ramiz Koesry, the selection of the *bu'awu huliliyo*, or coconut shell without eyes, symbolizes the preservation of one's reputation or honor (Kosry, 2021). The absence of eyes suggests a lack of vision or sight, essentially implying blindness. This signifies that any perceived shame or disgrace would ideally be concealed if observed or known. This notion parallels the concept of blood, representing the placenta's potential embarrassment, which is already enveloped and shielded by the coconut shell and the *woka* leaf (*ombulo*) (Kosry, 2021). Concealing the faults or shortcomings of an individual aligns with the moral teachings of religion, as emphasized in the Hadith of the Prophet: "Whoever conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his faults in the Hereafter (Al-Naisaburi, 2006). Concealing faults entails refraining from scrutinizing or uncovering the shortcomings of others, whether through surveillance or persistent search for errors and deficiencies. Conversely, the virtues of an individual, even if minimal, are highlighted and accentuated, symbolized by the protruding tip of the *woka* leaf (*ombulo*) and the white cloth extending approximately 5 cm above the ground after the burial of the placenta (*yiliyala*). The emergence of the *woka* leaf (*ombulo*) tip and the white cloth symbolizes the acknowledgment and manifestation of an individual's goodness and dignity. This implies that even after an individual has been laid to rest, it does not signify the burial

or oblivion of their contributions and merits. Instead, these contributions remain recognized and remembered, akin to the subtle protrusion of the *woka* leaf (*ombulo*) and the single piece of white cloth.

### **3. Islamic Law Perspective: Views of Islamic Scholars and Religious Figures**

Categorically, the traditions of Gorontalo can be delineated into two distinct forms: Islamic tradition and Islamicized tradition. Islamic tradition encompasses the practices of Islam executed within the framework of customary rituals, such as the *mobangu* (the recitation for newborns), *mokama* (the proclamation for newborns), and *mongakiki* (the acknowledgment of a newborn). On the other hand, Islamicized tradition refers to the local customs of Gorontalo that are not explicitly emphasized within Islamic teachings but are perceived to be imbued with Islamic values and principles (Kau, 2022). The *Molobunga Yiliyala* is a localized tradition of Gorontalo that possesses an Islamic character. A.W. Lihu recognizes this tradition as an enduring Islamic local custom passed down and preserved by traditional Muslim communities in Gorontalo. This tradition is perceived to be deeply infused with Islamic values. It serves as a manifestation of the cultural philosophy of Gorontalo: “*Adati hula-hula’a to sara’a, sara’a hula-hula’a to quru’ani*” (Customs aligned with Islamic law, and Islamic law aligned with the Quran) (Lihu, 2021). Therefore, Drs. K.H. Mu’in Mooduto assesses this tradition as aligning with the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, precisely the accommodative principle towards local customs, as long as they do not conflict with the foundational tenets of monotheism, humanity, and equality. Drs. K.H. Mu’in Mooduto grounds his viewpoint on the jurisprudential maxim:

“al-Ādah al-Muhakkamah” (Custom as a Source of Legal Consideration). He contends that the “*Molobunga Yiliyala*” falls under the category of customs accommodated within Islamic law (Mooduto, 2021). According to the thoughts of T.M. Hasbi Ash-Shieddieqy (1975), ‘*urf* or customary practices are not merely accommodated by Islamic law but can also influence legal evolution. Hasbi Ash-Shiddieqi emphasizes that all laws operate within the framework of customary practices, leading a jurist to adjust based on shifting customs. Among the shortcomings of certain Qadhi is their rigidity towards textual sources found in established books without considering the evolution of ‘*urf* (customary practices). Thus, fundamentally, custom represents behavior solidified into law (Ash-Shieddieqy, 2001). Al-Qarafi al-Mâlikî (d. 684 H) asserted that one would be in error if they solely adhered to legal opinions without considering the prevailing customs within society (al-Qarafi, 1926) Based on this principle, K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I. categorizes “*Molobunga Yiliyala*” as part of the ‘*urf*, which is a local tradition regarded favorably based on local values (Mustafa, 2021). Values such as humanity, which treats the *yiliyala* with human-like care by washing, wrapping, and burying it; and cleanliness, which avoids disposing of the *yiliyala* in waste areas or releasing it into rivers, are observed. The latter aspect aligns with the principles of *maqâshid al-syarî’ah*, particularly the *hifzhul bî’ah* principle, which emphasizes preserving a healthy environmental setting. Disposing of the *yiliyala* in waste areas is inhumane and can pollute the environment due to the potentially unpleasant odor and aroma it may emit. Similarly, releasing it into rivers would contaminate the water. Thus, the execution of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* ceremony implements the principles of *maqâshid al-syarî’ah*.

The Islamic legal arguments presented by Drs. K.H. Mu'in Mooduto and K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I. is rooted in the principles of *usul al-fiqh*. This implies that the tradition of *Molobunga Yiliyala* epistemologically has a normative basis within the discourse of Islamic law. Among the normative arguments by K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I. is the prophetic saying: "Whatever is deemed good by the Muslim community is also considered good in the eyes of Allah (al-Thabrânî, 1994b). This hadith is narrated by Imam Ahmad (d. 855 M/421 H), al-Bazzâr (d. 292 H), and al-Thabrânî (d. 360 H) in the book "Al-Mu'jam al-Kabîr" from Ibn Mas'ud (d. 652 M) (al-Thabrânî, 1994b). According to some scholars, the narration of this hadith is essentially attributed to the statement of 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (d. 652 M). However, the substantive content of Ibn Mas'ud's statement is accepted by scholars, including Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 241 H), who directly expressed it in his "Musnad" (Firdaus, 2004). In other words, whether attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) or ascribed to the companion 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, this expression serves as a basis for scholars in their acceptance of 'urf (tradition) (Syarifuddin, 2011). According to Muhammad Abu Zahrah (d. 1974 M), this hadith, both in its wording and intent, signifies that any matter that has become a tradition among Muslims and is perceived as good is also deemed good in the eyes of Allah (Abu Zahrah, 2011b). Similarly, Abd. Rahman Dahlan asserts that commendable practices prevailing within the Muslim community, which align with the general demands of Islamic Shariah, are considered virtuous in the sight of Allah. Conversely, actions contradicting the practices esteemed as good by the community can lead to challenges and constraints in daily life (Rahman, 2011).



According to K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I., the hadith recommends accommodating Islam to local traditions that are collectively deemed good. The phrase “فَمَا رَأَى الْمُؤْمِنُونَ” (What is deemed good by the Muslims) in the hadith indicates that positive values within local traditions are accepted as long as this acceptance is collective in nature. This is because it is implausible for the Muslim community to collectively agree upon negative actions (Mustafa, 2021). The viewpoint of K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I. appears to be derived from the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him): “Indeed, my nation will not agree upon an error (Al-Naisaburi, 2006). According to Sofyan A.P. Kau, the hadith unequivocally allows for public reasoning in determining what constitutes goodness. This implies that Muslims are granted the right to define goodness based on the localized values they uphold. Such goodness is inherently local; it is not of a general or universal nature. Consequently, what is agreed upon as a virtue by a specific group or community of Muslims in a particular region may not necessarily be acknowledged by another Muslim group or community in a different area, or it may be recognized but deemed commonplace (Kau, 2020b).

From a philosophical standpoint, the practice of *Molobunga Yiliyala* represents an embodiment of the humane treatment of body parts. Therefore, as emphasized within the Gorontalo cultural perspective, the tradition of *Molobunga Yiliyala* carries a dimension of humanity. According to Drs. K.H. Mu'in Mooduto, the humanitarian aspects of *Molobunga Yiliyala* both philosophically and within the Gorontalo cultural context—can be traced back to the opinions of classical scholars. Drs. K.H. Mu'in Mooduto references the Islamic jurisprudential views, citing the book of *Nihâyah al-Muhtâj*, which asserts that any separated human body part should be

buried (Mooduto, 2021). The "yiliyala" is a constituent part of the human body. Burying it is more recommended than disposing of it or casting it adrift in a river (Mooduto, 2021).

According to K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I, the opinion of Islamic jurisprudence scholars on the matter is based on a hadith from 'Aisyah, as narrated by al-Hakim, which states: "The Prophet Muhammad commanded the burial of seven parts of the human body, namely: hair, nails, blood, menstruation, teeth, clots of blood, and the placenta (al-Syâdzilî, 1981). K.H. Adin Mustafa, Lc., M.Pd.I. acknowledges that this hadith does not detail the specific procedures for burying particular parts of the human body. This implies that it is open for the Muslim community to implement the aforementioned hadith of Prophet Muhammad in accordance with their local values. The Gorontalo community manifests this in the form of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition (Mustafa, 2021). Therefore, Drs. K.H. Zainul Ramiz Kosry, M.Ag., categorizes the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition as a form of a living hadith. This refers to how a hadith is understood, internalized, and practiced by Muslims in accordance with their local context (Kosry, 2021).

K.H. Sukrin Nurkamedin, Lc., M.HI, supplements the juristic views by citing the opinion of Imam al-Qurthûbî (d. 671 H), who deemed it commendable (sunnah) to bury nail clippings (Nurkamedin, 2021). The opinion of Imam al-Qurthûbî (d. 671 H) is grounded in the hadith as recorded by al-Turmudzî (d. 279 H) and al-Hakîm (d. 1012 M) in the book of "*Nawâdir al-Ushûl.*" The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) is reported to have said: "Trim your nails, bury or conceal the nail clippings, clean the crevices of your hands, cleanse your gums, and brush your teeth. Do not come to me with yellowed and foul-smelling teeth (al-Qurthûbî, 1964). According to Imam al-Qurthûbî (d. 671 H), the directive

to bury nail clippings (فَلَا مَأْتِكُمْ اذْفُنُوا) signifies that the human body possesses sanctity or dignity (*fainna jasad al-mu'min dzu hurmatin*). Even when severed or removed, this sanctity remains intact. Therefore, it is deemed appropriate to bury them just as one would do with a deceased human body. K.H. Sukrin Nurkamedin, Lc., M.HI argues that based on the analogous reasoning of burying nail clippings, it is even more appropriate to bury the umbilical cord rather than discarding it (Nurkamedin, 2021).

Consequently, the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition is not fundamentally questioned except for certain aspects of its execution process, such as placing a lamp above the *yiliyala* (placenta) grave. This practice is scrutinized because traditional Gorontalo literature indicates that the «tohetutu» (traditional oil lamp) carries significance and aims to illuminate the grave, maintaining its sanctity for seven consecutive days (Daulima & Botutihe, n.d.). The belief that the lamp possesses a kind of “spirit” that will guard the infant is considered an act of shirk by Puritan Islamic groups, such as Ishak Bakari (Bakari, 2023), Yusuf Lauma (Lauma, 2023), and Ramli Jafar (Jafar, 2023). For theological reasons, it is asserted that only Allah, as the omnipotent entity, is the one who safeguards humanity, including an infant. Lihu (2021) also acknowledges that such a belief can undermine faith. However, the use of the lamp is not inherently linked to theological aspects; instead, it is more functional in nature. According to A.W. Lihu, the lighting of this lamp serves two purposes. Firstly, as a symbolic gesture, the presence of the lamp signifies a baby inside the house, ensuring that neighboring communities refrain from actions that might disturb the baby’s comfort during nighttime rest. Secondly, it serves as a protective measure for the *yiliyala*’s (placenta) grave. There is a possibility that animals, such as

dogs, might attempt to dig up the *yiliyala* (placenta) grave. With the presence of the lamp, any approaching animal would be deterred and keep its distance. This is why the *yiliyala* (placenta) is commonly buried beside the house, beneath a window, for easier monitoring and to prevent disturbances from animals (Lihu, 2021).

According to Drs. K.H. Abdurrasyid Kamaru, M.Pd.I., the *tohetutu* above the *yiliyala*'s (placenta) grave primarily serves as a protective measure against disturbances from animals that might attempt to dig up the *yiliyala* (placenta) grave. If some members of the community associate it with the safety of the baby, then such a belief is incorrect. The misunderstanding of some individuals does not necessarily reflect an error in the practice of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* (placenta) tradition (Kamaru, 2021). According to the analysis by Drs. K.H. Mu'in Mooduto, such beliefs are remnants of the early phase of Islam in Gorontalo, specifically during the reign of King Amai (1523-1550). During this period, the community still adhered closely to the Gorontalo cultural philosophy: "*Syara'a topa-topango to 'adati*" (Sharia is rooted in customary traditions) (Nur, 1979). Early Gorontalo customs' philosophical formulation indicates customary traditions' dominance over Sharia (read: Islam). The position of customary practices remained relatively strong institutionally compared to Sharia, as Sharia still relied on these customs (*topa-topango adati*). This contrasts with the third phase of Islam in Gorontalo, which gave rise to the philosophy: "*adati hula-hula'a to sara'a, sara'a hula-hula'a to quru'ani*" (customs align with Sharia, and Sharia aligns with the Quran). This third philosophical formulation is more evaluative and validative towards customary practices. The Quran, as a normative source, evaluates and validates the authenticity of these

customs. This evaluation includes beliefs concerning the theological function of *tohetutu* (Kau, 2019).

Sharia's evaluative and validative function regarding customary practices is expected to continue. This is because certain aspects of the local Gorontalo customs and traditions have faced criticism from religious figures. For instance, the act of taking a piece of soil from the bottom of the *yiliyala* grave and placing it slightly on a baby's forehead (*pomontowa*) accompanied by the statement: "*Yi'o ti da'a mohuhula, pata'o ma lowali ta yali-yali. Pilo lahuli mayi lo wutatumu ta mohuhula, dila bolo tonu mo'o hiyongo 'olemu ngopohiya lo'u mohile tutu*" (You were once an elder sibling but have become a younger one. Your elder sibling advises you not to cry, except when you need to breastfeed). Drs. K.H. Mu'in Mooduto expresses concern over this particular aspect of the *Molobunga Yiliyala* tradition, viewing it as a form of *tathayyur* (assuming bad luck for what is seen, heard, or known). This refers to the belief that God's will does not determine luck and misfortune but is attributed to specific events or actions (Mooduto, 2021). In other words, according to Drs. K.H. Mu'in Mooduto, the piece of soil, is not associated with the well-being or misfortune of the infant.

However, Drs. K.H. Abdurrasyid Kamaru, M.Pd.I. views the tradition of taking a piece of soil as a form of hopeful benevolence, which in Islamic jurisprudence terminology is referred to as *tafâul* (taking things as good omens or to make an optimistic prediction) (Kamaru, 2021), that is, it signifies holding a positive expectation towards something. This hope is further elucidated by the statement made by the *Imamu* when touching the infant's forehead, emphasizing that the baby should not cry without reason except when seeking nourishment (Kamaru, 2021). Typically, when an infant cries,

it indicates thirst. Crying serves as a means for the baby to seek nourishment. Islamic judge legitimize tafâul by referring to a statement (hadith qawlî): “There is no contagion (without the will of Allah) and no bad luck, and what astonishes me is *al-fa’lu*.” The Companions asked, “What is *al-fa’lu*?” The Prophet replied: “*Al-fa’lu* refers to a good word (al-Bukhârî, 1894), and the actions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him ) (hadith fi’lî): “From ‘Abbâd ibn Tamim, from his uncle, he narrated that the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him ) once went out for the prayer of *istisqâ* (prayer for rain), then stood facing the qibla and supplicated, turning his cloak (al-Bukhârî, 1894), and “‘Aisyah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: “No, but what is recommended is to sacrifice two sheep for a boy and one sheep for a girl. Cut its parts but do not break its bones (al-Bukhârî, 1894).

The Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) turned his *ridâ’* (headscarf) as a form of tafâul. According to Sathâ al-Dimyâthî (1310 H), this act symbolizes the hope for a change in conditions from drought to fertility (al-Dimyâthî, n.d.). Meanwhile, according to Imam al-Nawawî (d. 676 H), it signifies an optimistic attitude towards a transformation into fertile and expansive conditions (al-Nawawî, n.d.). Similarly, the prohibition against breaking the bones of the sacrificial goat in the *‘aqiqah* (the Islamic tradition of giving charity by sacrificing animals after the birth of a new baby) is understood as a form of *tafâul*. According to Sathâ al-Dimyâthî (1310 H), this serves as a hope for the safety of the child’s limbs (al-Dimyâthî, n.d.). Meanwhile, according to Imam al-Nawawî (w. 676 H), it is to ensure that the child is protected from all diseases (al-Nawawî, n.d.).

Thus, based on the perspective of the Islamic judge mentioned previously, the use of cultural materials or objects

in the tradition of *Molobunga Yiliyala* is permissible as long as it embodies hope and optimism. What is prohibited is associating these cultural materials or objects with misfortune. Therefore, the former is referred to as *tafâul*, while the latter is called *tathayyur* (Sholikhin, 2010). This opinion is based on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: “The Messenger of Allah did not harbor pessimism but rather hoped for good fortune (optimism)” (al-Haddâdî, 1937).

## **F. Conclusion**

The tradition of *Molobunga Yiliyala* possesses both cultural and religious dimensions. It is cultural in nature as it is performed based on the local values inherent to the Gorontalo culture, emphasizing environmental cleanliness and harmony with nature and other beings. Regarding environmental hygiene, the *yiliyala* (placenta) is not thrown away into rivers or waste bins, but it is carefully buried. This burial ritual is rooted in the reverence for human dignity, as the *yiliyala* is considered a part of the human body. Therefore, its treatment resembles funeral rites: it is cleansed with pure water, sprinkled with fragrant materials, wrapped with clean sheets, and buried by being interred in the ground. The choice of burial location ensures it does not disrupt other living beings. Furthermore, the tradition is considered religious due to its alignment with religious values. The religious values in question pertain to the reverence for human body parts, thus warranting burial. This value aligns with the norms within the discourse of Islamic law or the treasury of Islamic jurisprudence.

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