

## Brief Cultural History Pictures

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### Small-scale Paintings of Cultural History by K. Wilhelm

#### 1. About the Trip to Odessa

A trip to Odessa had a certain and, to be sure, significant influence on local trade. When the colonists hauled their wheat to Odessa in the autumn, they made their purchases there for everything they needed for home and economy. From the proceeds for the first wagon-load of produce (5 *Tschetwert* [1 *Tschertwert* = ca. 2.98 pecks or 26.24 liters], or 2 *Kila* [1 *kila* = 2.2 lbs or 1 kg]) little cash was brought home. Sugar, coffee, tea, rice, salt, clothing fabrics (but no finished clothing), scarves (*Tüchle*) for the women and girls, belts, shawls, winter hats, and sheep's fur (*Schafpelze*) (white-tanned with black collar, was considered the finest) for the men and for the boys. The cap was made of blue cloth with seal fur, had a flat bottom with a black shaggy tassel. The lambskin cap only became fashionable later.

The trip to Odessa was always an important event, for which one prepared carefully. Already a week before, the wheat was carefully cleaned because the Jewish merchants in Odessa were only too happy to make some dreaded deductions if the wheat was not absolutely clean. Then the necessary feed for three horses for a week, (that is how long the journey lasted), two sacks of chaff, a sack of oats and barley and a number of bundles of hay. When the wagon was loaded and everything was packed on it, a bulky bread bag showed up on the top, you could already see from afar where the journey was going. Once the preparation is completed, an inquiry is made as to who is going along. This is important, because a person does not like to drive alone, it was considered a risk, not only because of the insecurity in some areas, for example in the Dnjester

*plawnja*, it was even more important when crossing the Dnjester River near Majaki or over the estuary (*Liman*) near Akkerman. Such a large number of wagons accumulated in the autumn that the wooden dinghy (*Pram*) connection could not cope with them, and one often had to wait several days until it was one's turn. The wagons in front of a village then gathered in groups. And since might often took precedence over right, you can see what it meant when one group was quite strong. There were also places on the way where help had to be given to one or the other: dirt holes, where only the best horses brought the wagon through without aid, like in the wet-lands by *Plawnja*; or in the sandbank near Akkerman. When the day of departure finally arrived (one preferred to choose a Monday and a time of moonlight, so that one can also travel at night and be back by Sunday.) Then they asked the local weather prophet: "What gives with the weather, is it going to rain in the next days?" "I don't know, since yesterday the wind is blowing so furiously from the little valley of Kohnles (*Kohnlestäle*), I mean, it is blowing everything together. But the moon is in the fourth quarter and so it probably won't rain." Or he also said: "When the rooster crows on the manure pile, then the weather is going to change, or it will stay as it is." "Once you get back home, then you will actually know how it was." With that, a person was about as informed as before, but one consoled oneself: he had not predicted rain. The hundred year calendar was also consulted. Once all circumstances were considered, then bread was baked and a chicken or a lamb slaughtered and thus the bread bag was richly equipped. Finally, the relatives were solemnly bid farewell, and now it was said: "We are on our way in God's name!" "Come back home again in good health," the mother shouts out to them. "If it is God's will," was the last word of the departure.

On these trips, it was not uncommon for conflicts, sometimes even fights. Of these occasions, heroic deeds were often reported, which we children heard with the greatest admiration. Of course, ours were always the winners, even if we were in the minority. Instead of many, I just want to share two little funny stories. Where the place of the first incident took place, I do not remember, I also do not know what the cause was. But among them were Secretary Frieder and old Martin Scheid, the fat one. The opponents were Russians. When it came to a fist-fight, a Russian, with a three-pronged stick, hit Secretary Frieder over the back so that the vest went to shreds. Old man Scheid told the rest, in his Palatine dialect:

"Ich hun den Kerl gepackt bei de Ohra,  
der Kerl hat geplärrt, ich hun aber  
gemant, die Ohra bleibe mir in die  
Hände!"

"I grabbed the guy by the ears,  
the guy cried out, but I was  
determined that the ears stay in my  
hands!"

In doing so, he turned the victory to our side. The second story took place with Sarata people. These were on the road to Akkerman, who and how many others there were, I do not know, but there was old locksmith Jakob, of whose strength various versions were in circulation. It was near the three houses, the place called Trichatka, I think, still called so today. There was a deep well and it was hard to bring the water up. Now, in addition to the Sarata people, there was a large procession of Tschumak people,<sup>[\*]</sup> and there was a dispute over the water. Locksmith Jakob was not at the well. Then someone shouted:

"Jakob, sollst romkomma!" "Was geit's  
denn?" "Ha do die Russa wellet uns net an

"Jacob, you should come here!" "What is going  
on?" "Well, the Russians do not want to allow us

da Bronna lassa.” “Ja werret ihr net alloi fertig?” Ha sie sind ja so viel.” “Nu gang no, sag i komm gleir, i will no meine Gäul Futter neischütta.”

to come to the well.” “So, can’t you take care of it on your own?” “Well, there are too many of them.” “Oh alright then, tell them I will be right there, I first want to pour out some fodder for my horse.”

Jacob arrives as it comes to the fight, he grabs the nearest Russian by the collar with the right hand and the other with the left hand and held them apart with outstretched arms, so that they became red and blue in the face. The Russians wanted to come to the aid of their comrades, and as for the people of Sarata, they wanted to set themselves up in opposition.

“Leants no gau, so wie von selle oiner herkommt, lass’ i von dene oin laus. Den wo i eimol losgelassa hau’, der kommt neme her.”

“It is going to happen like this, as one of them comes here, I will release one of these. The one whom I once release, he is not going to come back.”

In fact, no one dared to approach anymore. With that, the conflict was decided.

“Soll i die zwei zehmaloufa lassa?” (Das heißt sie so gegeneinander zu führen, daß sich ihre Schädel etwas unsanft miteinander berührten.) “Ha schade tät’s neks!”

“Shall I have the two walk together?” (That means leading them against each other so that their skulls touched each other somewhat harmfully.) “Well, it wouldn’t do any harm.”

Then Jacob hurled the one to the right and the other one to the left. “What in the world is this!” (Ишь нѣмецъ какой) the Russians shouted in bewilderment.

\* [The word Chuk {Tschumak} is derived from the Russian word Chuma, meaning post. Since in earlier times the mail is said to have been transported by way of the ox furrows transporting salt to Russia in particular, they were given the name Tschumaki, which actually means “postmen,” a designation that was later extended to all, even to the South Russian and Little Russian ox carters not coming from Crimea. —*Reise im westlichen und südlichen europäischen Russland im Jahre 1855*, by Alexander Petzholdt, page 273]

I kind of got away from the Odessa trip a bit, but there is not much left to tell. The wheat was sold at the bribery booths (*Schmierbuden*), which is behind the Tiraspoler—Sastava. Once you have sold, unloaded the produce and received your money, then right away it was off to the Maybach Inn on the Maloarnautskaya, and then to the teahouse. On the way you took a *Bulka* (a white bread) with you, and the organ played something for us. The purchases required no less than two days, then the return trip home. In Majaki, boards and planks were also loaded. These were very cheap to obtain here. They came from the rafts that came down the Dnjester River with wheat from Podolia [a Russian administrative province north of Bessarabia]. From Majaki, the wheat was brought to Odessa via the Tschumak people, but the rafts were broken apart and sold as wood. Finally arriving back home dusty and dirty after 6 or 8 days, then you could have something to talk about as if you had made the longest journey.

## 2. The Garb of the Colonists

As everywhere in the world, the actual peasant garb of the colonists has been increasingly replaced by new clothing similar to the urban one, for both men and women. The age-old

saying: "Self-spun, homemade, thereby pure, is peasant garb," has not held true for a long time. The beautiful folk costumes in various areas of Germany and Switzerland disappear as folk costumes and only appear on special occasions, at folk festivals and parades; and there are usually not real farmers in such clothes, but city dwellers who can afford such an extra. The colonists who had immigrated from Germany naturally brought with them the costumes of their homeland. I do not know whether the clothing of the Bessarabian folks who immigrated from Poland had a pronounced character. As far as my memory goes back, the costume in the "upper" colonies was different from that of the "lower" colonies, both in cut and color; being brighter, more colorful. The main difference, however, was probably that in the "upper" colonies the Sunday coat (*Sonntagsrock*) was completely absent from the men, while in the "lower" even the poorest married man had one. Since the Schabo folks had immigrated as a closed Swiss group, they would probably also have brought along the costume of their homeland, because a hundred years ago, as in Germany, as well as in Switzerland, the actual peasant costume was still commonplace. Is it still possible to determine in Schabo today what it looked like in fashion and color?

In general, the clothing stock of the immigrants would hardly have been rich, because the colonists were poor on average. But the first purchases would probably have followed the samples brought along, at least in the form. The tailors among the immigrants knew no other patterns. Therefore, the clothes worn by the oldest women and men in Lichtental during my youth (the time of the 1850s and 1860s) would have corresponded to the clothes they brought with them. I want to describe them briefly.

**Female Fashion.** A pleated-rich, foot-free skirt, a short tight-fitting blouse (*Leible*) with folded puff sleeves (*Pouschärmeln*) (both, skirt and blouse, formed two independent garments, but mostly made of the same fabric), a wide apron, almost as long as the skirt, a square scarf in the form of a triangle, the tip of which crossed over the chest and was tucked under the hem of the skirt, a headscarf, slightly larger and also placed in the form of a triangle, the tip of which was slightly knotted under the chin, with simple shoes and white, self-knitted stockings. The color of the clothes was dark, during mourning black, white-flowered or white dabbed. The pretty black bonnet, which I still saw as common among women in my father's homeland in 1872, has not survived in Lichtental up to my time; originally it was certainly there. It probably disappeared because the bonnet was a work of art and no one could make it here. The warm clothes were made of self-spun cloth, the lighter one, at least for Sunday, from *Barchent* [a mixed fabric of cotton and linen]. But the influence of fashion gradually asserted itself. The skirt with the blouse was replaced by the *Zizkleid* [decoratively embroidered garment] with tight sleeves. Head scarves and neck scarves did not change much in shape, but they became more colorful. The small scarves were called new schalon scarves, probably the first came from the city of Chalon in France. They were of different color with beautifully flowered edge. All the clothes got a brighter, more joyful character. These innovations found disagreement, but they finally make a way in, yet the old Franzisk Hobbacher criticized them in his great "Punishment Poem" (*Strafgedicht*) with the words:

Ziz still has to be brought  
From the city of Paris,  
And among other things  
Shalon from Odessa.

Men also made fun of the new fashion, even though they had no reason to do so, because they were just as subject to fashion as women.

For Lichtental and Gnadental, Sarata was decisive in fashion matters, while this was influenced by Schabo. Today, the fashion newspaper probably plays the main role. By the way, even in my youth a fashion paper came to the village, but it did not force its way among the people. My father, before there was an *Odessaer Zeitung*, was a subscriber to the *Rigaische Zeitung* with two other colonists. This also brought a fashion supplement from time to time. My father pushed it a little scornfully to the fellow reader, who only had daughters: "This is something for your girls. Some of it will appear in church next Sunday." Because the church was the place where the latest in fashion was worn. With or without a fashion newspaper, fashion has taken its course at all times and will take it as long as there is a female gender.

**Male Fashion.** Long flap pants/dungarees (*Latzhosen*) (knee pants have not survived in Lichtental except for my time.) Vest with folded collar and folded corners, definitely with two rows of buttons, *Wams* [a shape of a jacket and an early stage of today's vest], likewise with folded collar and folded corners, also with two rows of buttons. The Sunday coat was made of finer cloth with a slightly bulging collar and long to the lap (*Schößen*). Every married man had his church coat (*Kirchenrock*), because in this he had been married. It was worn only when going to church, at funerals and other solemn occasions. The young man received the first better suit for his confirmation. He was newly outfitted from head to feet. It was not until about 18 years of age that the young man received the finer cloth wams (*Tuchwams*) and half-cloth (*halbtuchene*) trousers. However, he did not receive the coat (*Rock*) until his wedding. But when the master craftsmen trained apprentices, they had to give them the journeyman's clothing when they became journeymen. This also included a coat. Since the journeymen did not form a special class, they were sons of the masons like all their youngsters, it did not take long until the other single boys also got their coats. However, this was still only considered a church coat and then also a wedding coat. Only in the 1860s did the urban suit gradually come into fashion, according to my taste not at all to the advantage of the single boys. When I think of a young man of that time in his light blue dark striped flannel wams in light gray half-cloth trousers, in black atlas vest, with the silk neck scarf and light gray felt hat, this is a picture that was much more beautiful than the young people of today in semi-uneasy (*halbstättischen*) clothing. Rather, it allowed the youthful tight forms of the body to appear.

I have to say that people in the countryside used to be much more under the pressure of fashion than they are today. A mustache or full beard would have caused the greatest sensation at that time. I still remember being gawked when, after being in Odessa for a year, I came to Lichtental with a beard. "He has a mustache (*Schnauzer*)!" Or if a young man or even a boy had walked during the summer in a cap with a large shield, he would have been generally made fun of. "Katschub" [the looked down upon people from the Plattdeutsch area of Europe] would have been the least that would have been called after him. Therefore, at that time, a new fashion could only prevail after fierce conflict. Today, when there is no longer any specific peasant clothing, fashion has an easier chance to play out because clothing has become more characterless.

### 3. Trade and Industry in the First Period of Our Settlement.

Among the immigrant colonists were a sufficient number of craftsmen to meet the first needs. Among them there were blacksmiths, wagon-makers, saddle-makers, carpenters, locksmiths, shoe-makers, tailors and tanners; even those craftsmen who were actually not necessary, such as bakers, since every housewife took care of baking bread herself. However, since the craftsmen were as much involved with land as the others, they could only commit to their craft in the time when the field work was suspended, that is, during the winter. In the rest of the time the workshop was closed. One found it difficult when, in the summer, a wheel or an axle broke. Sometimes you helped yourself by working for the craftsman for a day or two in the field, and he returned to the workshop and repaired the damage. Some craftsmen gave up the craft completely and concentrated exclusively on farming, so that in the village it was completely forgotten that this or that person is a craftsman. So I was once sent by my father to S. W. to get his *Dexel*. "How is it that he has a *Dexel*?" I asked. "Because he is a wagon-maker," was the reply. I had not known that until then. (The *Dexel* is a tool for carving out the wheel rims.) To some family names in the village the craft designation was added, for example, Blacksmith Johann (*Schmied=J.*), where for some length of time already the man no longer took a blacksmith's hammer in his hand.

However, these conditions changed as the second generation grew up. According to the colonial directive, the minor right (*Minorat*) applied, that is, the youngest son was to inherit the farm, the other sons were to become craftsmen. In Bessarabia, this law was disregarded from the beginning, it was rather the case that usually the eldest son remained on the farm, because he was the first necessary labor force on the farm. The following sons then devoted themselves to a craft. There were also among the first settlers such craftsmen who found less of a taste for difficult farming than in crafts. These, either upon arrival, left for the city of Odessa, or they soon moved back to the city after settlement. Some became outstanding members of the German community themselves. When I mention names like Locksmith M. Müller from Sarata, Merz and Bleis from Lichtental, the Höhn brothers from Hoffnungstal, (in Bessarabia), I have not managed to list them all. The German colonists formed a special status in Odessa, the German artisan colonists, who enjoyed the same privileges as those in the countryside, they had their own administration with a mayor (*Schulzen*) at the head and were subordinate to the Welfare Committee (*Fürsorgenkomitee*). Incidentally, however, their position was quite unclear and the government tried to classify them as the little middle-class (*Kleinbürgerstande*), whereas the artisan colonists increased for a long time. It was not until the 1860s that the German craftsmen's colony was finally abolished. The last mayor was the wagon builder Michael Höschele. This German craftsmen's colony in Odessa was still important in that a large number of colonist boys were apprenticed to Odessa master apprenticeships, who then, after becoming masters themselves, returned to the countryside and contributed much to the further development of the craft. Such masters included Hansen and Eckert in Sarata, Gottlob Eckert in Lichtental and many others. But these men had another advantage: they spoke fluent Russian. This was particularly valuable after the abolition of the colonist status and the Welfare Committee (1871) with its German administration. The colonists were subordinated to the Russian Peasants' Authority (*Bauernbehörde*). Now you needed mayors and senior mayors (*Oberschulzen*), who spoke the Russian language. Eckert was elected as senior mayor in Sarata, after him Hansen, and Gottlob Erkert became mayor in Lichtental. It would probably have been similar in many

communities. I am not saying that the Russian-speaking of these men was the only qualification for the office, but in any case this circumstance played a role in the election.

Regardless of these masters, however, the number of craftsmen in the colonies increased significantly. The apprenticeship usually lasted 4 years, whereby the apprentice was often used by the master in farming, because very few craftsmen limited themselves to the craft, but also practiced farming to a greater or lesser extent. As long as the land was still cheap, the craft of many craftsmen gradually turned to farming. With the rise in land prices, however, this was always more difficult over time and gradually there were a large number of pure craftsmen. The number of blacksmiths and wagon-makers has probably become the most numerous. As far as I could notice, the craftsmen have made hardly any noticeable progress over against the past. The wagons show hardly any improvement in the form and execution of the work. It seems to be a little better in this respect with the carpenters and cobblers, while the art of the clothing-makers today does not bring about a well-fitting coat as was the case for 40 and 50 years. A special feature of the craftsmen's situation in Bessarabia is that not a single workshop has developed into a factory. In the other administrative sectors (*Gouvernements*), one could make other observations. The J.J. Höhn factory in Odessa emerged from a simple forge. The large factory Lepp and Wallmann in Chortiza originated from the finishing mill joinery of old man Lepp, and various other large factories owe their source to a workshop. We cannot give such an example in Bessarabia. Karl Layher's factory in Sarata was designed from the beginning as a factory by Hobbacher, Würch and Jundt. No other large company has developed in the German colonies of Bessarabia. The former windmills and horse mills have been completely displaced by the steam mills, but these have consistently remained customer mills, as those were; there is not a single steam mill which produces more for export, while the steam mills of a Niebuhr in Chortize, J. Tisza in Ekaterinoslaw and many other colonists shipped their flour to England, and that already 30-40 years ago. In wagon construction in the 1860s and 70s, it seemed as if it should advance to become a large company. At that time, two men in Gnadental, Johann Föhl and Karl Augst, went on to deliver wagons to Dobrudscha. The business got going, they not only had their own workshops with journeymen and apprentices, but they also employed numerous wheelwrights and blacksmiths in their own neighboring villages, to whom they also supplied some of the raw material. For a number of years their business went brilliantly, but then they turned to the grain trade, be it that this trade was even more advantageous for them, or that the competition in the wagon trade became to great. However, it was the case that very many soon turned to this trade and it seems that many craftsmen still deal with it today. This trade is now probably concentrated mainly in Tarutino. After Dobrudscha and further on, this trade has probably fallen asleep completely. At the trade exhibition in Bucharest in the autumn of 1921, I did not see a single colonist wagon on display. Föhl and Augst moved their trade to the city of Akkermann, where they fell into financial ruin after a short period of prosperity.

The factory may have taken down the craft, but it has not destroyed it. Plows, forks, shovels and much other equipment originally supplied by the craftsman have now been provided by the factory. But other things remained for the craft. In addition, the trade also has to make a lot of repairs to machines and equipment that the factory supplies. Also for the market, the craft works on a much larger scale than before; for example, the shoemaker's trade. What has pushed the craft even more into the background than the factory is the too little training for the craft. Its

aptitude is not sufficiently developed, its range of ideas is too narrow and, as a result, its manual skills are not advanced. Above all, there is a lack of a trade school for the craftsman.

While the immigrant colonists were reasonably supplied by their craftsmen, trade was completely absent. There were no merchants among the colonists. And even if colonists had wanted to deal with trade, there was a lack of the necessary capital. The only city from which goods could be obtained was Odessa, which was more than 100 *Werst* [1 *Werst* = 0.66 mile or 1.06 km] away. And on top of that, there was also the Dnjester River which blocked the way. I did not know of any German merchants in the colonies who would have emerged from that time. It was much more tempting for the wealthy and ambitious to devote themselves to grain farming and sheep breeding. In Lichtental, a colonist, Karl Heinrich had a business, in the village he was even called a merchant or often “Little Merchant” (because he was small in stature), but there was not much going on with his trade; what you needed, he did not have, and what he had, you did not need, is how you could characterize his trade. He sold his business and, if I am not mistaken, moved to Crimea. The first merchants in the colonies were Russian merchants driving around or travelling around, were called “Pepper Needle” (*Pfeffernudel*),” or the “Chest Carriers” (*Kistlesträger*) (Коробочники). The first name came from the fact that when the merchants came to the village, they called out their goods with the brief words: “Pepper, Needles, (Фефферъ, Нудлы), Things mother requires but does not have (Катунъ не требо муттръ).” They had their goods on a Russian trough-like wagon, which was higher and wider at the front than at the rear and was shielded with a tarpaulin. Above the arch (crooked wood) of the horse, in summer, the inevitable flowering ram beard bush (*Bocksbartbusch*) was emblazoned. They mostly carried dry goods (*Schnittwaren*), but also haberdashery (*Kurzwaren*) and, at least in the beginning, spices, which were still a rare item at that time. The “chest-carrier” carried all his stuff on his back. The stuff was in a rather high box of tree bark (*Baumrinde*), which contained a number of compartments, one above the other. In each compartment there were different goods. One had to marvel at the amount of small stuff he brought out of it. The travelling merchant laid out his goods either at the church square or in the yard of a well-known colonist, while the “chest-carrier” went from house to house and only displayed when a housewife wanted to buy something. Some of these Russian traders settled permanently in the German colonies. For example, two such Russians were based in Sarata, Philipp Pavlovich and Afanassij (Fannasse). Both became wealthy, and even the second generation of them was still in Sarata; but whether their trade still exists today, I do not know. The former came to Lichtental once a week with goods, and then became known as the jailer in the village: “As with Christian Seeger (later with Philipp Kuhnle), the merchant, that is, Philipp, had all the latest goods and well-stocked.” Here and there, there may have been many more such Russian traders in the colonies. I suspect that the large Sokolovyeru (Соколовы) family in Tarutino is also descended from such travelling traders. The Russian travelling merchants were later joined by the Hungarians, who traded in scythes, sickles, whetstones, mouse traps and the like. But the Hungarians also had another cultural significance. They also had books: calendars, ABC books, hymnals, prayer books (*Gebetbücher*). (When crying out the availability of the prayer books, they put the emphasis on the first “e” of **GE**-betbücher.) The richest of these Hungarians was J. Bakosch in Odessa, who probably had 20 wagons that passed through all of southern Russia. When I published my German reading book in association with Mr. Unruh, Bakosch was one of my major customers.



A striking phenomenon is that the Jews had only a small share in the trade in goods in the colonies in the first period and long afterwards, while liquor and wine trade were mainly in their hands. There is probably not a village within which a Jew did not have the community tavern or even a tavern. Yes, the Jews had another trade in their hands, the trade in animal skins, and that was no small item. Only later did the Jews also turn to the trade in goods and in some places completely took it over.

The German merchants from the colonists only became more and more prominent after the Crimean War. German merchants, who were quite sparsely represented, as mentioned above, became more numerous, with the educated or otherwise equipped with intellect being more often noticeable: Ch. Schöch in Sarata, Keck in Arzis, Scheller in Tarutino, Härig (?) in Borodino, Merz in Lichtental, Stephan in Teplitz, Nesper in Alt-Elft and many others. Most of these merchants made it to prosperity; but they did not bring it to those more significant merchants as the Mennonites had shown them, probably because they lacked union (*Zusammenschluß*). The Mennonites went shopping in closed company to the fairs in Kharkov and Poltava, and they had such a weight that they could even influence prices. How many of the above-mentioned German goods shops still exist today is not known to me on the whole, but their number is probably no longer large. One cannot deny the German colonists of Bessarabia the spirit of trade, on the contrary; but it is probably not that generous and far-sighted trading spirit that reminded of the German Hanseatic League, but it remains more of a spirit of chess, which is aimed at quick profit, and which has finally found its destructive and disgusting expression in land speculation. The German trade in goods in the colonies had mainly two competitors that became destructive to them: the quiet Jewish trade and the co-operative associations. The latter, however, although they have been detrimental to individual trades, are nevertheless of beneficial effectiveness. May they find the right leaders on their further development for the design of a large purchasing and sales cooperative. The economic headquarters at the People's Council (*Volksrat*) has taken the first steps in this course of development, may it continue to progress on this path.

More could be said about the emergence and importance of the markets in Tarutino, Arzis and Sarata; but I want to leave that to people who know the conditions better than I do.

My cultural-historical painting is incomplete and needs to be supplemented, perhaps also corrected. May both happen. I only intended to provide mosaic pieces that the cultural historian might insert into his image in order to give it a local color.

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