

ROLE OF SUFI UPRISINGS IN 8th AND 9th CENTURIES AH IN THE SPREAD OF SHIA IN IRAN

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ABSTRACT

Sufism is the outward and social aspects of Mysticism. One of the characteristics of Sufism in the 8th and 9th centuries AH is its militant aspect accompanied by Shia scholars named "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. In this period, there were some movements including the movement of Hurufism. In this paper, it has been discussed that the militant and anti-oppression aspect of Sufism during two centuries was due to this matter that they were Shia. This anti-oppression aspect has been one of the factors attracting the masses to Shia. At that time, the religion of Iranian people has been passing its transitional period. Although Iranian Shia in the transitional period was not exactly similar, in every respect, to Twelver Shia (Imamiyyah), but due to the proximity of Shia and Sufism and the spread of Sufism along with the activities of Shia scholars who had mystical attitudes on several occasions, the beliefs and thoughts of Shia and Shia jurisprudence in those two centuries were rapidly developed led to the establishment of the Safavid dynasty and the formal ruling of the Shia in the 10th century AH. Sufis, with the spread of the religious authority of Imam Ali (AS) and Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and bringing up Ja'fari jurisprudence (Fiqh) alongside Sunni Imams jurisprudence (Fiqh), finally helped Iranian people to accept Ja'fari jurisprudence superiority over the jurisprudence of other religions. Therefore, Shi'ite Sufism in Iran can be considered one of the main parameters in the foundation of Safavid government and Iranian Shia.

Keywords: *Mysticism, Sufism, Shia Movement, Shia in 8th and 9th Centuries (AH).*

INTRODUCTION

Shia is a religion that was born in the fight. The activities of Shia Imams, particularly the scientific movement of Imam Jafar Sadiq (AS) have gradually fixed Twelver Shia (Imamiyyah) alongside other Islamic sects in the Islamic community. This process lasted for hundreds years until at the end of the first millennium after Hijrah, Shia was considered as the formal religion of Iran. It is obvious this event happened in 10th century AH has different social, historical and ideological backgrounds and did not happen suddenly and without any preamble. The purpose of this study is to investigate Sufi movements of Shia and the social conditions during 8th and 9th centuries AH and their roles in the rise to power Safavid dynasty. One of the intellectual/ social movements is Hurufism considered the last movement of Shia before Safavid and with all ups and downs and strengths and weaknesses, it has played the main role in the common struggle against Mongols and in pushing the community of Iran towards Shia. The spread of this movement was gradually drawn so much in 9th century ah to Isfahan, Shiraz, Herat and Minor Asia (Jafarian, 2007:772). It is natural that the movements such as Hurufism which rises from the depth of the society, through their path, have the intellectual or practical slips or at the end

of their historical life face some deviations. In this article, our focus is not on the criticism of these slips but on the role that Sufi movements of Shia, particularly Hurufism in 7th and 8th centuries AH, had in Iranian Shia and Safavid government.

Companion Movement of Shia and Sufism in Islamic History

Islamic mysticism (Sufism) in the late 3th century and early 4th century AH has been trained under instructions of the Prophet (PBUH), especially Imam Ali (AS) in a particular religion. In 5th century AH, the spiritual influence of Islamic mysticism (Sufism) in the community was evident and finally in 7th and 8th centuries AH, this influence reached its maximum power and importance (Bayani, 2003: 146). At this time, in the late 8th century AH, Sufism surrounded the Islamic world and according to Shiabi, Sufis were the real authority at that time (Shiabi, 1980:158).

Even Sunni scholars, who are not so many neutral, have submitted that Shia had been pioneer in the tendency to the asceticism raised from the early Islam and they participated in its creation in various forms finally led to Sufism so that Ali ibn Hussein (AS) and Imam Baqir (AS) and Imam Sadiq (AS) were considered the leaders of the asceticism (Shiabi, 1980: 64).

It is clear that Shia, at the time of Taqia, was more moderate than today. In those days, Shia was not common due to its exact meanings in many parts of Iran (for types and meanings of Shia refer to Jafarian, 2007: 22-62). According to Shiabi, in those days, Shia was known people who loved Imam Ali (AS) and respected Omar and AbuBakr but vituperated about Yazid and Muawiya (Shiabi, 1980: 160). Sufis were, also, Shia based on this meaning because they accepted the spiritual guardianship of Imam Ali (AS) and Ahl al-Bayt (AS). Thus, Shia of Sufism during 7th and 8th centuries AH was not related to its theological meaning but it means that they accepted the principle of Velayat (Tawalla) not association with some caliphs and companions (Tabarra). However, the guardianship (Velayat) of Ahl al-Bayt is considered the basic common point between Shia and Sufism and the impact basis between Shia and the guardianship of Sufism (Refer to Jafarian, 2007: 761).

During these periods (8th and 9th centuries AH), due to dominance of Sufism and the increase of the power of Alavids, the movements of Shia emerged and most of the leaders were Alavids and Sayyids (being Alavid was one of the evidences of Shia at that time; Jafarian, 2007: 79). These movements, with the increase of power of Safavid in 10th century AH, led to the rule of Shia in Iran.

These sects or schools (Tariqah) emerged in the late 8th century and early 9th century:

Fazollah Estarabadi (740-796) and his Tariqah (Sufi-Shia sect or Hurufism); Nematollah Vali and his Tariqah; Hafez Rajab Bersi (743-813) and his exaggerated ideas about Shia; intellectual and practical method of the scholars of Hilla such as Ahmad ibn Fahad Hilli “Fakhr al-Motaqin”(841) with his Sufi initiative; Mohammad ibn Fallah (866) one of the students of Ibn Fahad Hilli and his strikingly movement who had power in Khozestan to Safavid period (Jafarian, 2007:774); Seyyed Mohammad Noorbakhsh that was the other student of ibn Fahad Hilli (Jafarian, 2007: 774) and his Tariqah; ibn Abi Jomhoor Ehsai and his philosophical sufi views printed in the book “Al-Mojalli” (he, in an narrative hadith, is resorted to Allameh Hilli)(Jafarian, 2007: 772). One of the most descriptions about Sufism in this period: the emergence of the initiatives and opinions of Shia Sheikhs of Sufi and the development of power of Sufi sects of Shia including Safavid dynasty, Noorbakhshia sect and Nimatullahi sect. Seyed



Heidar Amoli also is one of the mystics that found tendency from Suni to Shia and considered Sufism and real Shia as the same.

Of course, according to Shiabi, the thinkers of Shia, at that time, in validity and stability, had nothing less than their Sufi rivals (Shiabi, same). From here we see that their ideas (especially the school of Hillah) continued in next scholars and brought a clear change in the world of Shia. In fact, the thoughts of Mirdamad Esterabadi, Mirfendereski and Sheikh Bahai and even Mulla Sadra should be considered the followers of this flow. We know that Sheikh Bahai who is originally from Jabal Amil and had a special place in the Safavid court was quite willing to Sufism.

Seyed Heidar Amoli, as one of the mystics of 8th century, is one of the intersections in Sufism and Shia. From one side, he is one of the students of Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqīn (son of Allamah Helli) (Tabatabai, 1995:30), on the other side is one of the commentators of ideas of Ibn Arabi and one of the main causes in entering his ideas to the world of Shia (Jafarian, 2007: 762).

According to Seyed Heidar Amoli, although the Divine teachings of Shia Imams (AS) among Muslims have been released and Sufism in mysticism owes them, but due to the historical reasons and religious fanaticism at some point in the history of Sufism, this fact has been neglected. On the other hand, Shia had been focused on outward science and the guardianship (Velayat) of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) focused and was unaware of their internal affairs. These two issues caused them to be separated from each other (Amoli, 2012: 26-30).

It comes from the seventh century that these two issues have in common the fact that not only outward guardianship (Velayat) but also the reference of the inner guardianship (Velayat) and the divine deep theologies are Imams (AS). From then on, some persons such as Ala ud-Daula Simnani emerged and he promoted the mysticism relied on Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and accepted Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) of Imam Sadiq (AS) besides Suni Imams and officially promoted it.

Following this issue, the students of Ala ud-Daula Simnani wanted perfectly to be Shia and one of the students is Sheikh Khalifa- a right Shia and one of the leaders of Sarbadars in Khorasan. (He may have differences with Ala ud-Daula Simnani on Shia; refer to Haghighat, 2006: 93; but according to the researchers, this difference has been related to Taqīh of Ala ud-Daula Simnani: Jafarian, 2007: 756) that were officially Twelver Shia (Imamiyyah) (such as Nimatullah Wali and Mir Seyed Ali Hamedani; 714-786).

Our discussion of Sufism today and Sufism in absolute form is not to investigate its shortcomings and errors (these shortcomings and the deviation of Safavid rulers led these two religious movements to take apart from each other). Basically, the movements discussed in 8th and 9th centuries, such as Sarbedars and Hurufism, were not formally introduced Sufi and rather than be Sufi, were Shia. According to Motahari, Sufism is the outward and social aspects of Islamic Mysticism and its source is Shia (Motahari, 2004: 35-43) and their relationship has been resulted by this matter. Thus, due to mentioned issues, it can be stated that Sufism and Shia had not basically the remarkable differences and their intellectual and practical common point and their companionship in dealing with the Mongols caused them to be closed.

Transitional Period of Suni to Shia in Iran

The characteristics of Mysticism and Sufism, according to Shaibi, are se follows: Willingness to provide new ideas and modernity (Shiabi, 1980:166), Integration of philosophical and theological ideas of Sufism (Shiabi, 1980:166), Mahdiyyism thought mixed with the polarity of Sufism and Mahdiyyism claims (Shiabi, 1980:171 and 188) and the esoteric interpretation. He has



considered the esoteric interpretation as the common point between Sufism and Shia (Shiabi, 1980:179). These features collectively made backgrounds which separated the general public from the traditional religion of Sunni and approached to Shia. Sunni Islam, at that time, could not change its conditions and make new hopeful conditions. It insisted on the justification of the status quo. But Iranian community needed the new and revolutionary interpretation of the religion in order to gain the intellectual leadership of people and cope with the oppression of Mongols.

During 8th century, the monastery was one of the most important financial and political centers of the country considered an important major agency with a regular and extensive organization run under certain circumstances and under the chairmanship of Sheikh (Bayani, 2003: 147 and 147).

During this period, generally, the rules showed their high beliefs-mainly due to forced policy to Sufi Sheikhs (Safa, 1999: 4, 67). Even the Mongolian rulers and kings were forced to respect them. For example, the city of Multan, in that time Sheikh, Baha al-Din Zakariya, was the center of the Muslims in the subcontinent. Naturally, this position of Ilkhans led unwittingly to spread Shia and Sufism and the society pushed towards what the rulers were afraid of it. Harsh treatments could not also hinder this process and finally the power of the Mongols was removed and the Sufis and Shia Safavids were in power.

Safavid dynasty originality was a Sufi dynasty attributed to Sheikh Safi al-Din Isaac Ardabili (died 735 AH). Shah Ismail Safavid was the founder of Safavid Dynasty and the spiritual successor of Sheikh Safi al-Din. The Sultans of Safavid were called Great Sufi or Perfect Master (Ibn- Bazaz, 1993:70). When Sufi Safavids came to power, they declared Shia as the formal and official religion. Before Safavid, some Sufi movements such as Sarbedars, Hurufism, Noorbakhshia and Mushashaiyya were Shia (Refer to Tamimdari, 1994:1, 58-63). The evidence of this combination showed that they gathered the scholars and elders of Suni and Shia in their court. One of the evidences of such policy is the religious debates among the scholars of Shia and Sunni which in some cases led some kings to convert to Shia. Especially, Sultan Mohammad Khodabandeh (from 703-716) converted to Shia and this made the presence of Allamah Hilli in Iran and in the court of Sultan Mohammad. His presence in the court was so influential that was known "Regulation of Iran". Allamah Hilli with the king journeyed to different cities and advertised Shia and participated in the religious debated of Sunni, due to the command of the king (Jafarian, 2007: 722). However, these scientific/religious debates were not unprecedented (Refer to ibn-Atiyah, 1998:48).

It is noteworthy that Shia scholars, at the same time, turned to the contemporary jurisprudence and used traditions and Fiqh of Sunni for the spread of Shai. Therefore, the Shia and Sunni scholars attempted to attract Mongol rulers and their descendants to Islam and Shia, including Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Allamah Hilli. The Mongols convicted to Islam and Shia with their efforts.

Anti-Oppression of Shia Safavid

According to Zarrinkoob, the activities of dervishes in Amol and Sabzevar related to the movement of Sheikh Khalifa and Sheikh Hassan Joori, and the secret societies and the provocative propaganda of the followers of Seyed Fadlallah Estarabadi with the ambitious claims of some Sheikhs and Sufis such as Mohammad Noorbakhsh and Shah Nematollah Vali and Shah Qasim led to this matter that, in the late period of Timor and near the reign of Shahrukh, the population



of Sufis has been viewed suspiciously by the government; such as Kamal al-Din Hossein who was judged in the presence of Shahrukh by the jurists of Shafii due to a poetry cleared out the ideas of Sufism-Pantheism or Sain al-Din Tarakeh, one of the famous rulers and mystics of that era, was forced to defend- in his treatise “نفثة المصذور” his attention and employment to the knowledge of Sufism (Zarinkoob, 1998: 58). But probably the main reason of the opposition of Shahrukh and Sunni scholars of the court to Sufism is not the subject of pantheism and other subjects like it but it is the political power and the influence of Shia among the masses and their Shia beliefs. We know that the martyrdom of Shia scholars- such as first martyr (Shahid Awwal) and second martyr (Shahid Dowom)- is exactly the same reason.

While some Sunni scholars had no activity to overthrow the Empire of Mongols, the anti-oppression of Shia and Sufism was another factor increased their popularity. For example, Naj al-Din Kubra was killed in the war with the Mongols (Jami, 1991:427 and 598) and Baha al-Din Valad, the student of Naj al-Din and the father of Jalal al-Din Mohammad Rumi-due to (the scholar of the court). For example, Naj al-Din Kubra was killed in the war with Mongols (Jami, 1991:427 and 598) and Baha al-din Valad (the student of Naj al-Din Kubra and the father of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi) forced to emigrate from Balk, due to the vilification of Fakh Rzai-the scholar of the court- about him for Sultan Mohammad Kharazmshah and then Majd al-din Baghdadi was murdered (Kharazmi, unknown: 120-124).

In general, Sufism considered “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” as their duty to the rulers. Kendi remembered some groups of Sufism that in the year 200 AH were involved to the caliph in Alexandria as forbidding the wrong. Sahl Tostari knew “forbidding what is wrong” as one of the duties of a religious leader. Abu al-Hossein Noori Baghdadi (died 295 AH) broke the wine jars of the caliph wrapped in the foil and Hares Mahasebi (died 243 AH) considered the sincerely development of forbidding the wrong as the basis of Tariqat and knowledge of Allah. According to Zarrinkoob, the Sufis often attempted on the subject “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” and were repeatedly in risk when challenging to their masters of powers (Zarinkoob, 2003: 146). This sense of duty of Sufis was particularly found after the sovereignty of Mongols and challenging them.

The association of the monasteries with the Skeikhs has created some kind of brotherhood between Sufis so that the limits in the territory of Sufism were destroyed (Zarinkoob, 2003:79). This feature with the subject “enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong” helped the Sufis in order to do extensive social activities and to change the society in order to shorten the Mongols from the Islamic community. So that Sufism, as the first social institution and the first coherent organization, could arrange the early uprisings against the Mongols and gradually destroy their sovereignty in the Islamic country. This feature can be considered an important factor in the tendency of the public to Sufism and Shia.

Hurufism, as Marashis of Tabaristan and Sarbedars, were created after the Mongol conquest on Iran but the social and intellectual capacities of Hurufism have been led to spread their movement through the entire eastern region of the Islamic world. Hurufism, in fact, is some kind of Tariqat of Sufism established in the late 8th century AH, at the time of Timur, by incorporationg the elements of Sufism, Shia, Interpretation, science-oriented letters and esotericism and found many followers. The founder of this sect was Seyyed Abolfazl Fazlollah ibn Abu Mohammad Abd-al Rahman Jalal al-Din Estarabadi- nom-de-plume “Naimi” and “Halal Khor”- born in 740 AH. Hurufism is considered one of the important effective sects in Mysticism that has been very



effective in interpretation of the verses and hadith and the spread of the interpretation methods in Iran and Anatolia. Hurufism believes in the authenticity of the letters and it has no major difference with other esoteric sects only has much attention to mysteries of letters and numbers (Asghalani, 2013, 5:46-47; Golpinarli, 1985: 11). Most Hurufiyya texts have not yet been published and have been kept in forms of the manuscripts in the libraries of Iran, Turkey and Vatican. So, our references in this article are mostly Hurufiyya manuscripts.

Zarinkoob, in his book “Continuing Search in Sufism”, has used Sufism movements and has considered Safavid movement as the most effective and the most stable social movement of Sufism in Iran led to settle a Shia and national government. He also has considered the invitation of Sheikh Khalifa Mazandarani (736AH) and his student- Sheikh Hassan Joori (743AH) a social movement titled Sarbedars Movement in Khorasan. He has stated: “half a century later in this movement (793 AH), the religious revolutionary movement of Hurufism was formed by Fazlullah Hurufi (796 AH) arose against the rulers and the Sunni jurists and gave the social status to it. According to Zarrinkoob, the dissatisfaction of rural and tribal classes from the power of the rulers and the Sunni jurists was the significant factor in the formation of the Sufi movement (Zarinkoob, 1999:49-52).

As mentioned before, this period should be considered the transitional period of Iran from Sunni to Shia. In the statements of famous individuals of Hurufism, there is observed the combination of Sunni and Shia beliefs. For example, there has been said “Razi Allah Anho” and “Karam Allah Wajho” after name of Imam Ali (AS) (Majles, page 6) that is usually seen in Sunni books. “Praising the companions” is one of the other cases related to Sunni in Hurufism (Danesh 2,58). Other case is the use of Hadith and narratives of Sunni accepted only by them (Danesh 2,58). In some cases, it is quoted from Ahmad ibn Hanbal with the term “Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal” (Tehran University, page 221).

In terms of Islamic jurisprudence, Hurufism selected the middle way. Seyed Isaac, has stated in some part of his book title “Testament”: “the purpose of the legal provisions is not only the provisions determined by Abu Hanafiya or Shafei or Sheikh Fakhr al-Din, but the purpose of the legal provisions is every subject that has no religious differences. In this case, its truth has been proven to the interpretation knowledge of Quran (Miras: 91). Seyed Isaac has considered Fakhr al-Din as the equivalent of Sunni scholars. The prejudice of Sunni toward their own jurisprudence has been removed and they have been approached to Shia. The similarity of legal/practical method of the followers charily has been led to reduce their prejudice toward Fiqh of Hanafi and Shafii. This shows that Hurufism seek to enter Shia beliefs among their followers. It is not surprising that, due to this fact that we know the opinions Fazlullah has been spread among Sunnis, his supporters were gradually Shia. Basically, some of the elders of Sufism, before completing the demarcation between Shia and Sunni in the religious orders, acted between the four religions and Imamiyyah carefully. It means among these five religious sects, they practiced the religious sect which is far away the interpretation and close to the precaution and they gathered the different views of all scholars and the opinion of Imam Sadiq (AS) (as observed this method from Ala ud-Daula Simnani in his book “Malabed Menho fi al-Din”; refer to Simnani, 1990, 115 and 116). However, this method has been a mixture of Sufism and Shia led Sunni towards Shia.

In fact, the transitional period from Sufism towards Shia is as follows: someone who is inclined to mysticism, in the first step, he should understand the principles of religion, monotheism and



knowledge of Allah and the love of Allah. In the second step, he should leave the prejudice and following his special religion and take the distance from Sunni. In the third step, by accepting the inner guardianship (Velayat) of Imam Ali (AS) and Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet (PBUH), practically and esoterically should be from the guardianship of Ahl al-Bayt (AS) and was Shia. At this point, he may still be bound to one of the Sunni school of jurisprudence. In the fourth step, he should accept Jafari Fiqh as well as one of the religious sects of Sunni. In the fifth step, he should accept Jafari Fiqh as the closest approach to the tradition of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) that is Twelvers. So at that time, without any theological and historical debate and argument that the ignorance and the prejudice can often cause it to be inconclusive, large groups of Sunni believe in Shia¹.

The Role of Shia Scholars Inclined to Sufism

The role of the scholars of Imamiyyah or Twelvers with Sufism tendencies should not be ignored because they, secretly, fed the supporters of Sufism intellectually and jurisprudentially and had the effective role in the reunification of Sufism and Shia and Iranian Shia (Details of each one requires a separate discussion). For example, along with the after-mentioned movement, the great scholars such as Nasir al-Din al-Tusi (that has been linked with Sadr al-Din Ghonavi and many friendly letters have been exchanged between them) and Allamah Hilli (the father of Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqīn) that he is a mystic and praises the early sufis in the book “Kashf al-Murad” and believes that they are connected to Imams (AS) (Hilli, 1985:313) and Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqīn - the son of Allamah Hilli- who has Sufism thoughts and behavior and believes in Hurufism, Noorbakhshia and Mushashaiyya (about his relationship with Sufism at the same time that he was Shia theologian and Faqih; refer to Shiabi, 1966:288-301; Noorullah Shoshtari has emphasized this subject) and First Martyr (the student of Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqīn) that he was the intellectual and religious reference of Sarbedars and wrote the book “لمعه” for them.

As we have seen in 8th and 9th centuries AH, the center of Shia is Hilla and Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh- who has been inclined to Shia- invited Allamah Hilli to stay in Iran. But, Hilli only a few years was in Iran to promote Shia, and apparently due to unfavorable conditions, he came back Hilla. Sarbedars also invited Jamaluddin Ameli (the first martyr) to stay in Iran but he did not agree to stay in Iran. But a little later, with favorable conditions at the time of the Safavid, Shia scholars-that their center at that time was Lebanon- moved to Iran officially and Shia center of Hilla actually transferred to Isfahan².



CONCLUSION

¹ Of course, these words do not mean that all beliefs of Sufism are defensible. They, like other sects in the history of Islamic thought has been some weaknesses. Especially in their later generations that the dignity of sabers and the petty exaggeration and hyperbole prevailed among them, which, of course, had distance with Shia thought and action.

² In this letter, Ali ibn Moayed- the ruler of Sarbedars in Khorasan, named Jamal al-Din Ameli “Salek Nasek” and “مرشد امم” indicating he has been from mystics or at least, in views of Sarbedars, he has believed in mysticism; refer to Rozat al-Janat, lithography, part 3, page 2.

- 1- Mongols in 8th and 9th centuries AH actually due to lack of religious intolerance against Shi'a and the Sunni and the political considerations, created an open space for activities in Iran. Some of them were also officially Shia increased the process of Shia in Iran.
- 2- The Iranian Shi is a natural trend occurred in 8th and 9th centuries AH and before Safavid got into power, with the spread of Shia beliefs and not by force. In fact, Shia in Iran was the important factor to power Safavid rather than its consequences.
- 3- Sufism had the vital role in inclination of Iranian people to Shia, especially Semnani and Sarbedars and Hurufism.
- 4- Shia scholars, especially Allamah Hilli and Fakhr al-Muhaqqiqin (son of Hilli) had an essential role in pushing Sufism towards Shia and pushing Iranian people and Sufism towards Shia. In fact, Sufism during these two centuries gained the color of Shia fast. In these two centuries, Sufism and Shia came together and had worked closely on the intellectual and political struggles.
- 5- Discussion and debate on Velayat and its minor subjects had been expanded among Sufism because of the spread of Shia. It could be considered the common axis between Sufism and Shia.
- 6- Sufism, on the one hand, considered the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) as their total allegiance in mysticism because of their principles and the subordination from Sheikh and had such a sense to Ahl al-Bayt (AS). On the other hand, they had brought Jafari Fiqh along the jurisprudence of in Sunni imams. These two issues had a significant impact on its transition period from the Sunni to Shia.
- 7- Being fighter, anti-oppression and forbidding the wrong among Sufism and movements such as Sarbedaras and Hurufism in Mongol period attracted Sunni masses to Shia and eventually became Shia.

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