

## The Role of Religious Clans in The Political History of Iran

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### Abstract

*It has been 45 years since the popular movement that became known as the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran in 1979. The tradition of seizing power during a popular movement existed in the practice of Iranian clerics as early as the beginning of the 20th century, during the Constitutional Revolution. It is noted that religious organizations dominated the Kheyabani movement of 1918-1920 and the "21 Azer" movement of 1945. There is compelling historical evidence of how religious figures mobilized family members and kinship networks to establish themselves over a large geographical area, leading to institutionalization. Similarly, significant work has been done on the transformation of Shia Islam into Iranian Islam, creating a distinction from classical Islam. In this article, we attempt to create a general picture of how religious clans that formed in Iranian geography at the end of the Safavid dynasty became regional centers of power through their family ties in subsequent periods of rule. Similarly, using national and political protest movements occurring in the country, we attempt to summarize the history of how the concept of national religion first influenced the state as a local-regional force, and then took over and created a religious state. The article attempts to study the kinship and intra-family relations, as well as the traditions of inheritance of religious families operating in Iranian geography, within a historical framework.*

**Keywords:** Religious Families, Shiite Islam, Islam in Iran, Islamic Republic, Religious Identification, Religious State.

### INTRODUCTION

The overthrow of the Qajar government by coup marked the beginning of a new stage in the geography of Iran. The Pahlavis, who began practical activities to transform Persia into Iran, also began to support regional religious figures and representatives of religious clans.

During the Pahlavi era, regional religious clans began to gain increasing influence and serve the political system under the auspices of the state. Regional religious groups scattered throughout Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan coordinate their activities to gain political power and begin to receive support from both the state and religious leaders.

Religious figures created schisms to strengthen their positions and gradually moved away from the official religious doctrine. Religious "differences" turned into regional differences, which increased their impact on the masses. Gradually, each region and national group begins to distinguish itself from each other through its religious leaders, and the religious leader determines the identity of the region. In the 20th century, the Tabatabai, Bahbahani, and Shariatmadari families were active participants in these processes. Members of these families were represented in religious centers such as Najaf, Qom, and Mashhad, taught in religious schools, and headed regional religious groups. In some cases, the decisions of these regional leaders were more effective than those of the official head of state.

The process of formation of religious clans and expansion of their sphere of influence began during the reign of Sultan Hussein, son of Suleyman Safi, from the Safavid family, through the Majlisi family. It seems that close family ties, as well as religious and ideological ties, also play an important role in these clans.

### ANALYSIS

A month before Russia invaded Ukraine, the RAND Corporation, one of NATO's think tanks, presents its annual report. The presentation is signed by Ariana Tabatabay. This signature attracts our attention because it occupies a special place in the history of Azerbaijani religious thought, especially in the history of the national liberation movement and the Shia religious faith in southern Azerbaijan.

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The RAND Corporation is a research organization that “researches and develops solutions to public policy problems to help make communities around the world safer, healthier, and more prosperous.” The RAND Corporation’s website states that it is “a nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.” RAND is presented as a “think tank” that produces objective analysis and offers “effective solutions.” This political science article analyzes the relations between Russia, Iran and China, recommends closer relations with Russia and makes a number of similar proposals, which shows that the analysts are not very well informed about the reality in Russia. The absurdity of the proposals prepared for “NATO” becomes even more obvious a month later, but that is not our business. He is the author of the study we are interested in.

To help visualize his thoughts, the “impartial and objective” RAND Corporation analyst also included a composition by photographer Nazanin Tabatabai, a relative living in Khorasan, Iran. The caption reads: “How will Iran respond to the assassination of Soleimani and how will the escalation end?” (A mourner holds a photograph of the late General Qasem Soleimani as he prepares for a funeral procession in Tehran, “It’s a very emotional scene.” Although this young man, recognized as an expert in important centers of thought in Europe, lives the life of an exile, remaining true to the clan traditions of his grandfathers, he has not lost his Iranian fanaticism and continues to live it in new opportunities and conditions. This expert is the daughter of Javad Tabatabai, who was born on the 23rd of the month of Azar (December 15), 1945 in the city of Tabriz in the family of a cleric.

This family, known as the Azerbaijani Tabatabais, mostly does not know the Azerbaijani language and in some cases does not hide the fact that they hate it. Javad Tabatabai was born 3 days after the victory of the Azerbaijan National Movement and soon moved to the city of Qom. This scholar, who graduated from the University of Tehran, worked as a professor for a long time, defended his doctorate in Hegelian philosophy and became the editor-in-chief of the “Encyclopedia of Islam”, was also an ideological propagandist of the idea of Islam. Iranism and Persian hegemony, despite living in the United States. Although some analysts also called him a “liberal” and “nationalist”.

Who are the Tabatabais? Some sources believe that they came to Iran from Iraq in the early 19th century and first settled in the city of Kashan. Thus, the followers of this generation existed for a long time as Shiite scholars in Baghdad and Najaf. In 1835, Sayyid Jafar Tabatabai built a large mansion in the center of the Iranian city of Kashan, which took ten years to build. The desire to liken this structure to the myth of the Hum bird (sphinx) shows that although they came from Iraq and were Arabs, they were the guardians of the traditions of the Sasanian period. This building, built in Kashan, is known as the Tabatabai House. It is known that this man, a carpet merchant, also lived in the city of Tabriz, so this family subsequently had long and interesting connections with the city of Tabriz and the Azerbaijani Turks. In later periods, the Tabatabai lineage (meaning father's father or grandfather's grandfather) was expressed by adding toponyms such as Kumi, Iraqi, Borujerdi and Tabrizi.

If we go back a little further, we can build an even earlier model of this family clan. It turns out that this family, which defends Iranian and Persian hegemony, is in fact entirely Arab. Their genealogies indicate that Sadat Tabatabai is the name of the Sadat family, which continued the lineage to Hasan bin Ali. It is said that the ancestor of Tabatabai, Ibrahim, due to a speech defect, pronounced “Taba” instead of “Kaaba”, and for this reason they were called Tabatabai. Some members of this family, who settled in Iranian geography, also bore the surnames “Diba” and “Kia”, each of which has its own historian. From Sadat’s family, Banu Ataj went to the city of Amul, Banu Asaf to Isfahan, Banu Mustalhaqan and Banu Mostajd to Egypt, Banu Karki to Egypt, Banu Al-Mahal to Khuzestan, Baghdad, Aleppo and Arjan, and Al-Hakim and Zawari Tabatabai, who migrated to Iraq, later arrived in Azerbaijan and Tabriz, Borujerd. These family members were also stationed in the cities of Yazd, Tabaristan, Dilam and Ray.

Thus, divisions and coordination were carried out in the regions in order to influence religious ideas. This family clan, which had long strengthened its kinship ties through the exchange of daughters, found itself at the center of various political, ideological and some economic projects. Without going too deeply, I would like to note that the ideology of the Houthis in Yemen also stems from these ideas. Events such as republicanism, coups d’état, religious theorizing, capital management, professorship, diplomacy and betrayal are widely reflected in

the history of this family. The Tabatabais, who created a clan model similar to the Italian Medici family in European history, gained special influence in the south of Azerbaijan. However, they did not leave behind historical monuments, museums, works of art or cultural relics like the Medici.

Even then, the importance of close relations with other spiritual families for the creation of a strong family clan was known. They were members of the Hakim, Birujerdi, Imam Juma, Imami and Almasilar Majlisi families, which gained influence in a very large geographical area. By marrying the daughters of Muhammadtaghi Allama Majlisi, Bahbahani and Tabatabai became relatives. These relations make the Tabatabai family influential in Iranian geography. As mentioned, Tabatabai started to play an active role in South Azerbaijan in the second half of the 19th century. With the permission of Nasreddin Shah, "Faramushkhana" (Masonic society) organized by Melk Khan (of Armenian origin) started its activities in 1858. Through the appeals of various aristocrats, they informed the Shah that this organization was promoting reaction, conducting propaganda against the government (kingdom) and wanted to destroy the country. Nasreddin Shah appointed two respected scholars (religious figures) to investigate this issue in order to study the activities of the society. Seyyid Sadyk Tabatabai and Seyyid Ismail Behbahani investigated this issue, the goals and duties of the faramushkhana and personally declared to the Shah that there was no threat to religion or the state. However, in October 1861, Shah Nasir ad-Din decided to severely punish the members of the "Masonic lodge" (organization) and abolish it.

The late 19th century saw a revival of Freemasonry. In the late 1870s, Malcolm Khan created a model Masonic organization, the League of Humanity. Unfortunately, no documents have survived that would allow us to judge who participated in it. Since it is a secret organization, there are many legends about it. Its activities were directly aimed against the absolutist monarchy and against Nasir ad-Din Shah, whom Malcolm Khan personally opposed. Although, as before, he appealed to Islam as a religion of justice and mercy, and thus he managed to attract the clergy to his side. Melkom Khan, posing as an Armenian who converted to Islam, secretly married an Armenian girl in a church in Istanbul and at the same time was received as a prince in the Qajar palace.

The society he founded operated until about 1896. In the same year, the Shah was assassinated, and Malcolm Khan decided to limit the activities of the League of Humanity, hoping to establish good relations with the newly arrived Shah Mozaffar Ed-Din. This policy bore fruit, and in 1904, Malcolm Khan's successor Mirza Abbasqoli Khan Qazvini founded a new "Masonic Lodge" without encountering any obstacles from the state. This organization was of an elitist nature, as evidenced by its social and class structure. It can be assumed that there were indeed many religious figures among the members of the new structure. 16 deputies of the Milli Majlis of the first convocation were members of the Society (Humanity). Half of the deputies of the first Iranian parliament belonged to the clergy.

The new structure, whose spiritual mentor was Malcolm Khan, who lived abroad, advocated reforms in Iranian society, standing on moderate-liberal positions. However, at that time, the revolutionary movement that resulted in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 was gaining momentum, and the "spiritual Masons" became active participants in these processes. There were many religious figures who advocated limiting the power of the Qajars by a constitution and a Majlis, and they played an important role in the overthrow of the absolutist system. The peculiarity of the new Masonic organization was that it was organized under French patronage.

Therefore, some scholars who had a negative attitude towards the British willingly joined this group. It is noted that two religious figures, in particular, Seyyid Muhammad Tabatabai, were the initiators of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 and that he joined the "Lodge of Awakening" because he believed in it. Years later, his son Seyyed Mohammad Sadiq Tabatabai wrote about this in a letter addressed to Professor Mohammad Hossein Mimandinejad: "After the revolution, my father and I joined the French Masonic lodge. And suddenly we discovered that the English hand was reaching into the sleeves of the French lodge, whose goal was the colonial enslavement of our country. "As soon as my father and I realized this, we immediately left that little house." Although it is difficult to believe the sincerity of the letter, we must know that at that time there were only 359 high-ranking clerics in the country, 175 of whom had reached the rank of "Mujtahid Jami al-Sharia."

It is no coincidence that Sheikh Fazlullah Nuri was executed by the revolutionaries after the victory of the constitutionalists in July 1909. The death sentence was pronounced in court by Sheikh Ibrahim Zanjani under the supervision of Mashrut, and the execution was carried out under the supervision of the Armenian Yeprem Khan. This "revenge", carried out under pressure from Seyyed Muhammad Tabatabai and Abdullah Bahbahani, is not assessed unambiguously in the sources. It was not a legal incident and did not look like the criminals had crossed the line. After the execution of the Sheikh, his son Sheikh Mehdi (father of Kiyanuri, one of the leaders of the Iranian Tudeh (People's) Party), apparently considering that his father "committed crimes" against the Iranian people, refused to accept the body, and the body was buried by Khomeini's mother, Mrs. Hajar. Hajar Khanum honored her relative's memory with ceremonies on the third, seventh, and fortieth days, and held a mourning ceremony every year until her death in 1917.

In the early 20th century, in the Qajar state, especially in southern Azerbaijan, the clergy served as leaders of political parties, and mosques served as organizational offices. All centers of power were either supporters or opponents of Rouhani. His ideological center was the city of Qom. Events in Tehran and other provincial cities were either controlled, supported, or rejected from Qom.

The term "ayatollah" was coined as a concept by Mirza Ali Agha Tabrizi. When Fazlullah Nuri attempted to gain veto power for his fellow mullahs from Tehran under the banner of the Council of Jurists, Mirza Ali Agha opposed the idea and stated that only the opinion of the "taqlid" sources was worthy of consideration in matters of faith. On December 21, 1911, after the Russian siege of Tabriz ended, a clash occurred between the Russian troops and the revolutionaries. The Russians insisted that he (Mirza Ali Agha Tabrizi) sign a letter acknowledging the revolutionaries' responsibility for starting the conflict. He refused, and the Russians hanged him along with twelve others on Ashura, December 31, 1911. The Russians massacred the constitutional revolutionaries of Tabriz and their relatives, and killed many civilians of Tabriz. The total number of those executed is estimated at about 1,200. Tiqat ul-Islam's grave is in the Poets' Cemetery in Tabriz. The "Masonic-clerical" constitutionalists were not harmed in these trials.

In the first half of the 20th century, the Tabatabai family proliferated in Tabriz. The famous Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Hasan Tabatabai Tabrizi (brother of Allama Tabatabai), Ayatollah al-Uzma Sayyid Ali Tabatabai Tabrizi (1922-2014), Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Javad Tabatabai Tabrizi (1928-2008), Ali Ghazi Tabatabai, also known as Allama Ghadi or Ayatollah Ghazi (1869-1947), and others. In general, the Tabatabai were long-lived, and since they had several wives, they traditionally had a large number of children. However, those who write political and religious history, perhaps intentionally, do not provide information about the close family ties of their children or their mothers in the biographies of prominent members of this family. It seems that this family clan reached an agreement to keep their relationships secret.

Participants of historical events note in their memoirs that Seyyid Abdullah Behbahani, Seyyid Muhammad Tabatabai, Seyyid Muhammad Sadik-Tabatabai, Malek ul-Motakallamin, Seyyid Mortaza Ashtiani, Seyyid Mortaza Jafar Sadr al-Olama, Jamal ad-Din Vaez and many others were among the leaders of Iran. They were members of the "Awakening Lodge" (a Masonic group) and the "Ohuvvat" Society. Seyyid Muhammad Tabatabai, who is presented in many literary sources as a constitutionalist, is the son of Seyyid Sadik Tabatabai. Sadik Tabatabai was a member of the Masonic lodge "Faramushkhane", founded by Melk Khan in 1858.

He betrayed the trust of the Qajar dynasty and joined the Masonic lodge with Bahbahani (a descendant of Majlisi's daughter), and then continued his betrayal in the constitutional movement with his sons. These treacherous clergymen, who wanted to create an "Islamic Assembly", eventually agreed to create a "national assembly". Today, there are people with the surname Tabatabai in Europe - from poker masters to TV stars, from chess masters to rock musicians. It is unlikely that any of them have read their grandfather's book "Al-Mizan". However, since 2012, the Qalem Publishing House, together with the Tekamül Translation Center, has been translating and publishing in Azerbaijani the 20-volume book by Allama Seyyid Muhammad Huseyn Tabatabai, entitled Al-Mizan, and distributing it in large quantities.

Although the book lists a prominent scholar, the late academician Vasim Mammadaliyev, as the editor of the publication, I do not think that this scholar knew anything about this book. Over the years, the elderly scholar's health would not have allowed him to read or edit a 20-volume book. It also remains a mystery where the 40-

50 thousand manats needed to translate and publish this book would come from. An analysis of the book and its influence on the Islamic-Shiite worldview in Azerbaijan is the subject of a separate study. Similarly, the multi-volume books of the Majlis, which began to be widely distributed throughout Azerbaijan in the mid-19th century, also arose as a result of religious and clan relations.

Sultan Husayn, who came to power at the end of the Safavid era, was considered a common man and was nicknamed "the good". The young shah was a devout Muslim, and one of his first decrees was associated with the elevation of the cleric Muhammad Bekir Majlis, Sheikh-ul-Islam of Isfahan. This decree tightened the laws against Sufis (dervishes), banned the use of alcohol and opium, and imposed restrictions on the behavior of women in public places. Governors were ordered to follow Sharia law.

It is known that Allama Majlisi was the son of another famous Shiite theologian, Muhammad Taqi Majlisi (1594/95 - 1659/60), known as the First Majlisi (Majlisi-Awwal). In this regard, the Assembly of Muhammad Bakr is also called the Second Assembly (Majlisi-e-dev). The eminent philosopher Hurrah al-Amili can be considered both the teacher and the student of Allama Majlis, since they both issued each other a certificate (ijazah) certifying their competence in the field of Islamic sciences.

Some sources report that Allama Majlis's book Bahar al-Anwar consists of 120 volumes. However, a modern bibliographic search shows that it consists of 107 volumes. It is believed that his children, students (60-80 people), his sister (Amina Beyim Majlisi) and her children actively participated in the writing and distribution of this book. The main problem is that, unlike the Majlisi Islamic scholars, they wrote their books in Persian, not Arabic, and their books expressed serious hostility towards the classical Islamic world. With the transition from Arabic to Persian, Islamic theological literature left the sphere of general discussion of Islamic scholars and became the monopoly of Persian-speaking clerics. It was at this time that they began to revise the criteria, moving away from the long-accepted norms of "authentic hadiths." It was during this period that the disintegration of religious clans and the division of Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and the geographical regions of Eastern Anatolia into zones of influence began.

Marja'i-taqlid, mujtahid, Ayatollah Ozma Seyyed Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari Tabrizi - was born in the city of Tabriz in 1906 (1284 AH). His father, Seyyed Hasan Shariatmadari Tabrizi (died in 1914, 1293 AH), was one of the famous preachers of Azerbaijan (Tabriz) of that time. Like most children from religious families, Seyyed Muhammad, following the path of all other religious scholars, first received his education in the city of Kum, then in Najaf and became a student of Sheikh Abdul Karim Haeri Yazdi and Mirza Javad Maliki from Tabriz. Although there is no information about this person in Azerbaijani and Russian, some information is provided in English-language sources. However, extensive information about this scholar can be found on the Wikishia platform (in Persian). What is surprising is that Wikishia presents Seyed Mohammad's worldview differently from the propaganda of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In all cases, articles about Sharia law can be seen as an established line serving corporate interests. During an interview as a correspondent for the AN.TV TV channel, the interviews, structured in the form of ordered questions and prepared answers, do not "shed light" on the dark pages of Shariatmadari's political views and biography. Likewise, despite the fact that the son of this religious figure (who has recently given frequent interviews), Ahmad Shariatmadari, lived the last forty years of his life in exile (in Germany), despite the fact that he claimed to be an Azerbaijani, despite the fact that by claiming that his father led a national movement, he tried to gain the support of the leadership of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Despite his call, he has not been to Azerbaijan yet because he knows that coming to Azerbaijan for any reason in these forty years will be considered a loss of trust in its leaders.

Seyyed Muhammad Shariatmadari led the Halaoglu Mosque in Tabriz since 1934, and in 1950 he returned to Umm and began teaching there. Thus, he saw his national spirit in Azerbaijan (the national government established under the leadership of Pischevari) in Tabriz and lived in Azerbaijan at that time. Although it is impossible to determine Shariatmadari's views on the national movement and the national government in Azerbaijan based on specific reliable sources, his disagreements with Khomeini and the opinions he expressed in interviews show that his attitude towards national issues did not coincide with the official position of the state.

After the proclamation of the National Government in Tabriz in December 1945, Ayatollah Tabatabaei moved from Tabriz to Qom with his family. Although Shariatmadari did not have any high titles at that time, he was in charge of the mosque in the Tabriz bazaar, and we know how important the bazaar was in a city like Tabriz.

Shariatmadari was considered to be a supporter of the theory of "civil Islam", which is contrary to the theory of "political Islam". According to civil Islam, Islam is not a supporter of authority and does not prescribe any specific forms or methods of governance. According to this theory, the main duty of a lawyer is to be a lawyer, not a politician. There is no need to interfere in politics. Shariat Madari believed that it is necessary to recognize national sovereignty. In his view, national sovereignty eliminates the domination of the people over the people, and the duties of the clergy do not contradict national sovereignty. In his view, a "religious lawyer" can speak out only in two cases: in the first case, when one or a group of actions are contrary to Islam, the constitution or the general interests of the people, and in the second case: when an important matter needs to be done for which no one is responsible. when it comes. If this information is correct, then the institution based on Sharia should have supported the Azerbaijani national movement, the revolution of the "21st Azer".

Here we respond to the view expressed by the scholar's son, Seyyed Hasan Shariatmadari, in his recent interviews regarding the collapse of the "People's Muslim Movement". The national democratic movement in the south of Azerbaijan in 1979-1981 was multifaceted. No one except the People's Muslim Party and its leader Shariatmadari had the power to mobilize the people. Everyone was waiting for the fatwa of the leader (Sharia). Shariatmadari, who did not support Khomeini's call for a referendum, heard hundreds of thousands of people chanting slogans in the streets of Tabriz: "The original, based on the law, was destroyed, no matter whether there was a reform or not, it was doomed." He knew that the whole of Azerbaijan was waiting for "fatwa" from him, and only his call could unite all the "left and right", democrats and non-democrats in Azerbaijan. He did not do this. Although there were 11 committees and armed groups in Tabriz and its provinces. This organization became an influential force in Azerbaijan (Tabriz), which intimidated people and secular movements. The memoirs of the national forces say that his son (who was interviewed in recent months) Hasan Shariatmadari led the armed forces. Despite the fact that he studied technology in Iran, he was a confidant of his father. Hasan Shariatmadari, who led the armed forces of the "People's Muslim" organization, despite the lack of theological education, spent a lot of time with theologians. During the elections, he attacked people with different views and "national activists", beating them to death and oppressing them.

In the early years of the revolution, he attacked the 13,000-member trade union of the carpet weavers and workers of Tabriz, stormed the "khanei kargara" (house union of workers) located in the Baghmesh area of Tabriz, destroyed them with his armed gang, fatally beat the leader of the organization, and then executed him through the government. It was this Ahmed Shariatmadari who imprisoned him for six years. Of course, at that time, everyone knew that the patron of the Farshi Iran company was the Shariatmadari family. This patronage passed to them after Tabatabaei, and they "conveyed" to the Ayatollah that if the carpet weavers and workers formed a union, he would have to cut "your share". At that time, in the vanguard of these efforts was Khazan Shariatmadari, who called himself "secular" and entered into an alliance with Reza Pahlavi to create a "democratic Iran". It is believed that in the early years of the Islamic Revolution in Azerbaijan, when a political vacuum of power arose, Khomeini, who did not travel anywhere during the national slogan processes, came to the city of Qom with his son to meet with Shariatmadari. After this meeting, all national hopes and aspirations came to an end. Of course, he could not sit in Qom and lead the national movement in Azerbaijan. Perhaps, he did not even have such an idea. It is possible that the national rights of Azerbaijan were a means of bargaining with the central government for him, and he lost in this bargain.

Now his son uses the topic of "Azerbaijan" as a means of commerce. In his address, he said: "Northern Azerbaijan is an independent republic, and Southern Azerbaijan belongs to Iran..." The journalist who passed the microphone to him did not ask him: "From whom did you receive this authority?" Who gave you this authority? Have you ever held a referendum in Southern Azerbaijan? Who do you represent?

## CONCLUSION

However, in all cases, Marjai Taqlid, Mujtayid, Ayatollah Ozma Seyyid Muhammad Kazem Shariatmadari Tabrizi played a significant role in the national thought of South Azerbaijan, in the victory of the February

Revolution (1979), in the theory of non-conflict national interests with religious dogmas and in the emergence of the people's Muslim movement. The views, expressions, actions and comments of this group are very reminiscent of the model of the Taliban group in Afghanistan. Of course, they were not national, and are not so today.

Iranian Shiite religious-family clans, formed in the early 18th century, were structured and gained ideological power in the second half of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, after the constitutional revolution, the organization also acquired political power. Many of those who call the 1979 revolution an Islamic revolution know that the popular movement did not start with Islamic ideas, and these processes were later called an Islamic revolution.

Currently, the institutionalized religious structures in the Islamic Republic of Iran are still in the hands of religious family clans, and powerful families consolidate their power through family ties with each other. As a result, there are more than a thousand religious figures in the Islamic Republic of Iran who bear the title of Ayatollah.

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