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How Jawi Script Influences Religious Attitudes: An Evidence from Aceh

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HOW JAWI SCRIPT INFLUENCES RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES: AN EVIDENCE FROM ACEH

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Abstract

This study described the religious attitudes influenced by the Jawi Script upon people living in the Seulimeum Subdistrict of Aceh Besar District, Indonesia. The data for this qualitative study were gathered through interviews and observations that included three activities: behavioral observation, direct questioning, and direct disclosure. A checklist and field notes accompanied observations, while direct questioning and direct disclosure involved unstructured interviews with eight respondents. The data was then qualitatively analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. The study's findings suggested that the Jawi script instructional process had influenced respondents' religious attitudes toward aqidah, ibadah, morals, and social society. In the field of aqidah, Jawi script instructional process strengthened the aqidah that adheres to the creed of Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah. They also rejected another aqidah, armed with knowledge from the Jawi Script. Religious attitudes also were reflected in ibadah activities under the knowledge learned from the Shafi'i school of thought's Jawi Script. Regarding morals and social society, Jawi script instructional process strengthened husband-wife relationships, strengthened social traditions with Islamic nuances, and fostered social unity.

Keywords: *Jawi Script; Instructional Process; Manuscript Preservation; Religious Attitudes.*



A. Introduction

Islam and the Acehnese people are inextricably linked. Along with the arrival of preachers bringing Islam to Aceh, Islam has taken root for a long time. Because they follow Islam, their religion influences the Acehnese people's attitudes. Furthermore, when studying Islam, they use the Jawi Script as an important source, which has long shaped their religious attitudes.

Research on the religious attitudes of the Acehnese people has long been the focus of researchers. Nurdin (2016), for instance, studied the tradition of celebrating the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in Acehnese society. Arifin and Khambali (2016) also studied the ritual of washing the head in the graves carried out by the Acehnese people in the Pidie District. These two studies seek to explore the religious attitudes of the Acehnese people but do not examine references and sources of insight that shape the religious attitudes of the Acehnese, especially those from the Jawi Script. Religious attitudes do not appear by themselves but involve references and the instructional process of these references.

Another study was conducted by Nur (2015), who examined the correlation between the religious beliefs of the Acehnese people and moral attitudes. This study focuses on the moral aspect and includes no Jawi Script study material. Lismawani (2020) also examined the contribution of Dayah Darul Ihsan in fostering religious education for the people of Darussalam, Aceh Besar, Indonesia. The previous study, although it discusses the development of community religious education, limits itself to the development of Dayah Darul Ihsan and does not discuss the religious attitudes of the community and references to the Jawi Script that are studied by the community.

All these previous studies show that many researchers have researched religious attitudes. However, they do not highlight the relationship between the religious attitudes of the Acehnese people and the source of knowledge that influences their attitude, namely the Jawi Script. The orthography used to write Malay was adapted from the Arabic script (Coluzzi, 2020). The Arabic script comprises twenty-nine letters written from right to left by connecting the consonants according to the letters and words.



Arabic script is entirely composed of consonants with no vowels. The Jawi script has 36 letters, 30 of which are from the Arabic script and six additional individual letters created based on the sound and spelling in Malay and are not found in the Arabic dialect. The six letters are *fa*, *nga*, *ca*, *nya*, *va*, and *ga*. The Jawi script also has an upright writing form, lined scripts and dots, and continuous scripts.

The study of Jawi Script has been going on for a long time, and the books written in Jawi Script have also become the main reference in non-formal learning for Acehnese society. The tradition of writing the Jawi Script also began in Aceh and spread to other parts of South East Asia (Sakti, 2011; Hermansyah, 2014). Simultaneously with the arrival of Islam in Aceh, Arabic script entered the lives of the Acehnese (Sakti, 2011), and Lamuri, located in the village of Lamreh, Aceh Besar Regency, Aceh Province, Indonesia, was one of the earliest Islamic sultanates in Southeast Asia (Ibrahim et al., 2022).

Various efforts have been made to spread and preserve the use of the Jawi script. The Malaysian government, for instance, has taken numerous steps to address the lack of use of the Arabic alphabet for writing the Jawi script and make it more popular among people at all levels (Salahuddin, 2012). The publication and use of Jawi profoundly impact the spread of Islam and the development of the Malay language in the Malay world. The script has left much of the literature and beautiful calligraphy at the historic site.

Manuscripts written in the Jawi script have played an important role in the Malay world's Islamic education tradition (Badaruddin, 2012). Using the Jawi script made many Malay scholarly works more productive and accessible to the general public and Muslims from other continents (Rahman et al., 2018). Islam and the script have elevated Malay and Malay concepts to the global stage, paving the way for greater interaction with Muslims worldwide (Ismail, 2015). The script was widely used to write religious books, stories, laws, and other official documents (Abdullah et al., 2020). The publication and use of Jawi profoundly impact the spread of Islam and the development of the Malay language in the Malay world (Rahman et al., 2022).



Southeast Asia has several Islamic writing traditions, alongside the translation of Islam into a variety of local cultures, and *kitab Jawi* and *kitab kuning* (books written by early Islamic scholars in Arabic) were the leading ones, which continue to exist today (Burhanudin, 2022). Among Muslims, *kitab* is special in making socio-religious life (Burhanudin, 2022). *Kitab Jawi* is still studied and has become an important reference point for Islamic learning in Muslim communities, particularly rural Muslim communities (Zulkhairi, 2019).

Since the fifteenth century AD, *kitab Jawi* has been known to have played an important role in transmitting Islamic knowledge to the Malay people in the Malay Indonesian Archipelago (Badaruddin, 2012). Jawi script was used until the Roman script (Rumi) brought in by European traders and colonizers began supplanting it in the nineteenth century (Coluzzi, 2020). Despite that, Jawi still appears in the linguistic landscape of Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Pattani, Thailand (Coluzzi, 2020).

This study then seeks to examine the religious attitudes of the Acehese people in the fields of *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and morality, which are influenced by the Jawi Script instructional process. By looking at the sources of knowledge that influence attitude change, the direction of future changes in people's attitudes can be predicted.

B. Method

This qualitative research describes the religious attitudes influenced by the Jawi Script instructional process in Aceh, Indonesia. It is a natural study that attempts to observe the research subject's natural conditions, namely the Acehese people's religious attitudes. It was conducted in the Seulimeum Subdistrict of Aceh Besar District, Indonesia. The location was chosen because most people used the Jawi Script as a reference and source of religious knowledge. The study lasted six months, from November 2021 to April 2022. The researchers came directly to the research site to participate in the Jawi Script instructional process and to conduct observations and interviews.



This research included eight participants, two of whom acted as Jawi Script teachers and six of whom acted as learners of the instructional process. They were chosen because they actively participate in the Jawi Script instructional process and are local community leaders.

Data were collected using the attitude measurement method proposed by Azwar (2016). He believes three methods can be used to determine a person's attitude toward something: behavioral observation, direct questioning, and direct disclosure. To measure religious attitudes through behavioral observations, the researchers observed the respondents' visible behavior, such as religious activities, celebrations of Islamic holidays, religious conditions in the community, and other religious activities. Observations are accompanied by a checklist and field notes, allowing researchers to document all religious attitudes-related events at the research site.

The researchers conducted unstructured interviews with respondents to measure religious attitudes through direct questioning. This interview format was chosen to avoid the shortcomings of measuring respondents' attitudes through direct questioning. Researchers and respondents can discuss and comment on religious attitudes during this interview. It ensures the respondents' responses are consistent with what they understand, do, and feel. The researchers also ensured that the interviews were conducted naturally, with in-depth and free discussion but by the theme, so that respondents could express themselves openly and freely.

To assess religious attitudes through direct disclosure, the researchers asked respondents to speak persuasively about the impact of the Jawi Script instructional process on their religious attitudes. They can freely express how the process has affected them thus far. All respondents' responses to direct questions and disclosures were recorded using a voice recorder from a mobile device. The recording is then transcribed into written form for further data processing activities.

The data gathered from the observations and interviews were qualitatively analyzed using descriptive techniques. The data analysis process was carried out both during and after data collection. Data analysis entails



categorizing data into three categories: religious attitudes related to *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and morals, as well as social society. The data is then described so that the results and interpretations related to the religious attitudes of Acehnese people influenced by the Jawi Script instructional process can be shown.

C. Result and Discussion

Jawi Script instructional process with several methods and patterns contributes to shaping the Acehnese people's religious attitudes in the fields of *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and morals. This religious attitude shapes culture and becomes a provision for people's daily lives. A description of the attitude can be explained as follows.

1. Religious Attitudes in the Field of *Aqidah*

Islamic scientific sources learned from several Jawi Scripts became the dominant factor in shaping beliefs and knowledge, which ultimately formed the religious attitudes of the Acehnese people. In the field of *aqidah*, the community in the research location adheres to the *aqidah Ahlusunnnah wal Jama'ah*. They get knowledge about the *aqidah* from several Jawi Scripts such as '*Aqīdat al-Nājīn fī 'Ilmu Uṣūl al-Dīn* and *Kifāyat al-Mubtadīn Fī i'tiqādi al-Mu'minīn*. They also reject the arrival of another *aqidah* incompatible with the *Aqidah Ahlusunnnah wal Jama'ah*.

The rejection of another *aqidah* has become an unwritten mutual agreement among the people and the local wisdom of the local community. This refusal is intended to undermine the community's previously strong unity. It supports Abdurrazak et al. (2022), who believe that local wisdom is important to explore so that local people are not contaminated by incoming ideologies that could threaten their harmony. Furthermore, the Jawi Script is cultural-religious literature, and the spirit of tolerance, peace, and harmony can be spread through the tremendous values in cultural-religious literature, daily cultural conduct, social norms, and cultural art (Waston, 2018).

This study's respondents also regard *Ahlusunnnah wal Jama'ah* as an important consideration when learning Jawi Script. Even though they are discussing *fiqh*, they also discuss *Aqidah Ahlusunnnah wal Jama'ah*. One of the

respondents, MAW, believes that *fiqh*, *aqidah*, and Sufism must all be taught concurrently and integrated into a learning forum. This integrated submission is also meant to respond to other currents that are still up to date and are thought to deviate from the *Aqidah Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah*.

The community in the research location was also asked to be consistent with the *Aqidah Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah*. They are also reminded to defend their *aqidah* until death. It is said that the Devil will try his best to mislead people toward death. Facing this condition, they are always asked to invoke protection from Devil's deceptions.

Various attempts of respondents to accept, develop and even maintain the *Aqidah Ahlusunnah wal Jama'ah*, even to death, show their commitment to the *aqidah*. Moreover, they even refuse another *aqidah*. The rejection activity is difficult because it intersects with foreign parties and threatens the respondent's *aqidah*. The various efforts of these respondents indicate their attitudes toward religion. This attitude was carried out after they took part in Jawi Script instructional process, and it revealed that this activity affects their religious attitudes, especially in the field of *aqidah*.

2. Religious Attitudes in the Field of *Ibadah*

Sublimation, or the induction of emotional changes, is one of the religious functions of society. Religious teachings sanctify all human endeavors, not just the afterlife but the mundane. All human efforts as long as they do not conflict with religious norms and are done sincerely because Allah is *ibadah*. Some of the *ibadah* is ritualistic, such as praying, fasting, and so on, while some other forms of *ibadah* are non-ritual, such as cooperation, helping the poor, building hospitals, and so on (Ramayulis, 2011). The first group of *ibadah* is usually called *ibadah mahdhah* while the second group of *ibadah* is called *ibadah ghairu mahdhah*.

This research found that the *Jawi Script* guided the *ibadah mahdhah* performed by the community. One of the respondents, TB, revealed that participating in Jawi script instructional process taught him how to pray and fast to perform all these *ibadah* properly and correctly. Regarding



prayer, the observation results show that the obligatory prayers performed by the respondents together are under the prayer guidelines described in the Jawi Script book. The Jawi Script book also defines their prayer readings and movements.

The same thing happened to the way they ablated themselves before praying. TB explained that he performed ablution by the instructions in the Jawi Script book. TB's acknowledgment was also strengthened by the results of the researcher's observations that the respondents performed ablution according to what they learned from the Jawi Script book. Moreover, TB also believes that touching a wife or woman who is legally married can invalidate ablution. According to TB, he found out about the knowledge after attending Jawi Script instructional process.

Moreover, TB also emphasized that he actively participates in Jawi script instructional process. Besides TB, MS, another respondent, It was also confirmed that he was committed to participating in Jawi script instructional process. According to him, learning the Jawi Script improves how he worships according to Islamic religious guidance. He also believes that after studying Jawi Script, he has changed and become more diligent in his worship.

MS also reported that his life improved and became calmer after taking Jawi script instructional process. He also admits that he can understand and practice Islam daily by following these activities. A similar confession was also expressed by SD, where he admitted that before attending Jawi script instructional process, he worshiped by imitating other people. A similar activity also happened to another respondent, ZA, who revealed that after studying the Jawi Script, he understood that he had made many mistakes in *ibadah*.

These acknowledgments indicate that the Jawi script instructional process has significantly influenced the respondents' religious attitudes. The study of the Jawi Script has changed their attitudes toward religion and made them more aware of the correct way of *ibadah* following Islamic religious guidance. These respondents' confessions also indicate that religion has become a means to satisfy their curiosity. The longer they follow the study of the Jawi Script, the more they understand their mistakes in *ibadah* so far.

Through learning the Jawi Script, they can correct these mistakes so that their *ibadah* becomes true and by the guidance of Islam.

3. Religious Attitudes in Moral and Social Sectors

a. Harmonization of Husband and Wife Relationships

As previously explained, the Jawi Script books discuss various matters related to religion, including problems in domestic life. This issue is important because life in the household affects performance in the life of the nation and state. If the husband and wife relationship in the household does not get along, various negative effects will occur, such as neglected children's education and husband or wife cheating. The choice of learning topics on household management procedures is also important because almost all learners are married. It is in line with Gentrup et al. (2020), who argue that instructors need to be aware of students' achievements and learning resources to promote students' learning.

Fulfilling this need, the Jawi Script was present and discussed the issue. One of the Jawi Scripts that discusses household life issues and becomes the respondents' reference in this study is *Syarah 'Uqud al-Lijain fi Bayani Huquq al-Zawjain*, written by Syaikh Muhammad bin Umar Nawawi al-Bantani al-Jawi. The book discusses the rights and obligations of wives and husbands in the household so that they can carry out their respective roles well. Among the obligations of husbands discussed in the book are teaching religious knowledge to their children and wives and providing for and doing good to them. It is said that a husband needs to do more for his wife, children, and companions than provide food, drink, clothing, and other necessities of life, all derived from lawful wealth. Meanwhile, according to the book, the wife should serve her husband. *Syarah 'Uqud al-Lijain fi Bayani Huquq al-Zawjain* also discusses the merits and sins resulting from these rights and obligations.

Over time, the study of the book *Syarah 'Uqud al-Lijain fi Bayani Huquq al-Zawjain* has influenced respondents in caring for the household. SR, one of the respondents, revealed that after taking Jawi script instructional process, she no longer immediately denied her husband's words. She also admitted



that she no longer did anything that her husband forbade. The husband and wife conflict that previously often occurred were also reduced. Moreover, SR also saw a change in her husband's behavior towards her, and the husband was very proud and happy for her.

SR's explanation confirms that the study of Jawi Script has significantly influenced SR and her family. SR can now understand her rights and obligations in the family. She is also committed to fulfilling her obligations to the best of her ability. The Jawi script instructional process affected both SR and her husband and family. Now, SR's husband is proud and happy with SR. This condition will make their families happy so that they can produce performances that benefit society, nation, and state.

b. Community Social Tradition

Jawi script instructional process also impacts *ibadah ghairu mahdhah*, as well as the social tradition of the society that the people of Aceh continue to uphold. It backs up the findings of Astuti et al. (2022) that Malay culture and customs are Islamic in terms of clothing, morals, ethics, and social interaction.

One of the cultural traditions that are influenced by the Jawi script instructional process is a feast. There are various types of feasts held by the Acehnese people, such as *khanduri blang*, *khanduri gle*, *khanduri molod*, feasts on major Islamic days, and feasts when someone experiences something such as dying, giving birth, being sick, or succeeding in doing something. All these feasts are considered expressions of gratitude to Allah (Rahman et al., 2021).

One of the feasts routinely done by the community is *khanduri blank*. This feast is very famous in the tradition of the Acehnese community and is one of the local wisdom that continues to be preserved. *Khanduri blang* is also a form of *ibadah* realized through prayer and charity. They pray that the rice fields they work on can yield maximum results and benefit the community. The *khanduri blang* event is also filled with giving motivation in working the rice fields. They also discussed the provisions that must be observed while working in the rice fields.

According to the respondents, the Jawi script instructional process also influenced the *Khanduri blank* tradition. They do *khanduri blang* three

times in each growing season. The activity is based on the knowledge they obtain from the Jawi Script, such as *Siyāru al-Sālikīn*, which explains that Allah sends angels in every stage of planting crops. According to this book, Allah sends 1,000 angels when people start planting their crops, 3,000 angels when the plants start to bear fruit, and 6,000 angels after the harvest. Allah sends 10,000 angels again when the crops are donated to others. Allah sends angels to bring blessings, especially to those who plant, harvest, and share the harvest with others. Based on this belief, respondents did *khanduri blank* three times, namely when sowing rice seeds in the fields, when the rice began to contain and turn yellow, when the rice was harvested, or during harvest celebration. Respondents believe that the feast will bring angels who will bring grace because they have worked and shared the results of their work with others.

The implementation of *khanduri blank*, which has become the respondent's tradition and culture, manifests the practice of Islamic religious values that they believe in, especially from the Jawi Script. The script has become a source of value, which the respondents use as a guideline. This habit becomes a societal tradition because it is used as a frame of reference in acting and behaving. This tradition is then integrated into people's lives, difficult to change, and set as a standardized norm in people's lives (Ghazali, 2011). Moreover, they also believe that a *khanduri blang* is a form of *ibadah* that will result in a favorable reward from Allah. It implies that *khanduri blang* reflects religious attitudes obtained through the Jawi script instructional process.

For the respondents, implementing the *khanduri blang* tradition as a manifestation of religious attitudes has also become a strong social system. Religion, as a belief system, requires society as a place (locus) to maintain and develop religion, according to religious anthropology (Ghazali, 2011). According to the human mind, religious understanding, attitudes, and behavior constantly evolve. Even though religion and scriptures are believed to come from God, their interpretation is made by humans, and their implementation occurs in human society. One of the ways respondents apply God-given religion in their lives is through the conducting of *khanduri blang*.



In addition to *khanduri blang*, other feasts are held by referring to Jawi Script books. The '*aqiqah*' feast is an example. This feast is done by a family when their child is born. According to the respondents, the implementation of this feast was influenced by some books, including Jawi Script entitled *Akhhbar An-Na'im* written by Shaikh Abdus Samad, better known as Teungku Di Cucum. So far, this book is still studied by the community, even sometimes special events are held for reading this book in poetry. The community also listened enthusiastically to the reading of this book.

The community in the research location also performs some other feasts, such as feasts when someone is sick, dies, or succeeds in doing something. They also hold feasts to celebrate major Islamic days, such as 1 Muharram, 12 Rabi'ul Awal, 27 Rajab, 15 Sya'ban, etc. At 12 Rabi'ul Awal, feasts are held on a large scale, lasting up to three months from the early 12 Rabi'ul Awal. It happens as 12 Rabi'ul Awal is the birth date of the Prophet Muhammad. The community held a feast, read prayers for the Prophet, and listened to stories or advice about the Prophet Muhammad. They call this activity *khanduri molod*. These various feasts are also influenced by learning Jawi Script.

Because of the many activities that involve the community, they are accustomed to being together and united. The local community must be united to carry out the various activities. The management of several traditional ceremonies promotes the values of togetherness and cooperation among rural communities, mostly farmers (Budi et al., 2019). Cooperation will foster a peaceful environment, providing comfort for each amid social, national, and state life (Muhajir et al., 2022). Furthermore, religious unity and cooperation from local wisdom are capable of preventing conflicts or causing community divisions (Zakiyah, 2016). Previous research has also shown that a successful, harmonious social life cannot be separated from adopting a brotherhood culture, which combines solidarity and tolerance (Arjawa & Zulkifli, 2021).

In the researchers' observation, they always hold a meeting before engaging in certain activities. *Teungku Imum* and *Geusyiek*, as village leaders, are always meeting leaders and are responsible for these activities. Following the meeting, they carry out the decisions made during the meeting. The fact

demonstrates that the community in the research location can unite and successfully implement the community's social traditions.

The success and unity of this community cannot be separated from the community's learning of the Jawi Script. *Teungku Imum* and *Geusyiek*, as village leaders, are in charge of various community activities, including the Jawi script instructional process. *Teungku Imum* and *Geusyiek* even imposed social sanctions on community members who did not participate in the Jawi script instructional process. *Teungku Imum* and *Geusyiek* will only attend various feasts in his house if he participates in Jawi Script instructional process. Community members then will not attend the feast if the *Teungku Imum* and *Geusyiek*, the village leaders, do not attend. *Teungku Imum*, *Geusyiek*, and community members will prevent the feast from failing. The fact shows that the Jawi script instructional process also influences the implementation of various religious traditions that take place in the lives of the society.

Religious tradition has two main functions that have a dual role: society and individuals. The first function is a force capable of creating stability and cohesion in society and individuals. At the same time, the second function is religious traditions that act as agents of change in society or the individual self, even in conflict situations (Jalaluddin, 2016). Religious traditions, because they are ongoing, take the form of religious attitudes and become part of a person's identity statement. The attitude then influences a person's thinking, taste, or evaluation of everything religious. These changes originate from the Jawi script instructional process.

Data analysis of this research shows that the Jawi script instructional process affected Acehnese attitude regarding *aqidah*, *ibadah*, morals, and social. This finding supports Krok (2016), who confirms that religiousness significantly affects both subjective qualities of life dimensions and life satisfaction among parents and adolescents. Krok (2016) also found that individuals with an affirmative religious attitude had significantly higher life satisfaction and quality of life than those with critical and passive attitudes toward beliefs and practices.

In fact, not only in the social field, but religious knowledge also influences people's attitudes in various sectors of life. Many researchers have



discovered a link between religion and public attitudes in specific sectors. Sherkat and Ellison (2007) discovered that religious affiliation, participation, and beliefs influence environmental concerns and personal and political environmental activism. Religion also aids in acquiring adaptive functions by providing meaning to life, a sense of hope, and spiritual comfort in the face of disease burden. Religious coping is also an important tool for rehabilitation and relapse prevention in patients with schizophrenia (Gedevani et al., 2022). Otjes (2021) also discovered that the policy positions of religious parties influence voter acquisition. In short, Moon et al. (2018) even emphasized: "religious people are more trusted than non-religious people." These findings show that religious knowledge influences people's attitudes in various dimensions of life.

D. Conclusion

Aceh and its surroundings have deep historical roots in the Jawi script. The script evolved during the Islamic Empire of Samudera Pasai, then to the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, and then to other Malay Islamic kingdoms such as the Kingdom of Malacca, the Kingdom of Riau, and Palembang. The script contributed significantly to Islam's spread and shaped the Acehnese people's religious attitudes. The Jawi Script, written by Acehnese and Nusantara scholars, provided the community with Islamic knowledge. So far, the people of Aceh, particularly in rural areas, continue to rely on the script as their primary source for studying and comprehending Islamic teachings.

Learning the Jawi Script contributes significantly to the religious attitude of the community, as evidenced by their confidence and trust in *Ahlusunnnah wal Jama'ah*. Jawi script instructional process also has an impact on *ibadah*, as well as the formation of morals and social traditions in Acehnese society. The Jawi script instructional process shapes the religious attitude of the community, reviving the traditions and celebrations of the great days of Islam, forming a harmonious family, and assisting in the realization of community unity and togetherness.

However, this study is limited to religious attitudes toward people living in the Seulimeum Subdistrict of Aceh Besar District, Indonesia. The



other study needs to be carried out with a larger sample size. Furthermore, this study is limited to religious attitudes in *aqidah*, *ibadah*, and morals. Further research into the impact of the Jawi script instructional process in other fields, such as politics and economics, is also recommended. A complete and comprehensive understanding will be obtained through various studies.

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