

QURANIC THEMES AND REFLECTIONS IN ISLAMIC ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

The present study attempts to analyze Quranic themes in Islamic art and architecture. This descriptive-analytical paper was carried out through desk studies. Results indicate that with the presence of true religion of Islam and Islamic teachings in Islamic countries, art and architecture gained a fresh flavor. Designs such as arabesque designs, Islamic decorating, spiritual sense in the spirit and body of buildings and artworks are a prominent feature of Islamic art. These characteristics have taken on a new role by removing the holiness of human and idols and using Quranic themes and designs. Quranic themes can be found mostly in the inscriptions, entrances, and internal and external walls of buildings. Quranic themes in Islamic art and architecture indicate its value and importance. Quranic themes have concretely strengthened the importance of unity and servitude in art and architectural works in various Islamic monuments. After combination with the Islamic culture, art and architectural works became more coherent, more enduring and more popular

KEYWORDS: Quranic themes, Islamic art, Islamic architecture, Islamic culture, decorations.

INTRODUCTION

Art can be briefly defined as follows: art is a truth rooted in spirituality and unseen which navigates, notifies, and educates humans and tolerates the life for them. In general, art is the physical interpretation and manifestation of the spiritual architecture, inspired by mysticism and knowledge of principles and values, which define a specific world-view and ontology in order to satisfy the sense of truth seeking and spirituality of human in order to soften the material life, make it tolerable and relax the soul in the prison of body. The real art can be defined as reasonable, sensible, paranormal, manifested (in nature, invisible, visible and discovered) and manifestation of glory and justice (Nagizadeh, 2012). The art in itself is a transcendental phenomenon which strives to imagine the world in a way that human can tolerate horrendous concerns of alienation from himself and nature in an acceptable manner and reduce his suffering. According to Burckhardt, Islamic art is an impersonal aesthetic experience of unity and multiplicity of the world in which multiplicities convert into unity in a novel order area (Sharifian, 2012).

Islamic mysticism has important elements compatible with art and has been the way of many great artists. Although each aspect of nature is a symbol of evolution and divine love and makes human to carefully observe and respect for nature, it seems that Muslim artists have always been driven by abstract designs whose initial natural pattern is often unseen and unknown. In this case, one can point to thousands of decorative arabesques and angelica shapes which lay the foundation of most Islamic works. Sometimes these designs are inspired by geometric shapes or a combination of regular and non-regular shapes by a mind apparently cut off from the sensible world (Khazae, 2013). The present research tries to analyze the influence of Islamic culture and Quranic themes on Islamic art and architecture through desk studies.

Quran and Art:

One of the natural aspects of human is aesthetics and beauty-friendliness. Human inherently loves beauty because art and beauty come from his nature. In the Holy Quran, God has paid attention to this human's need. Art is a powerful, effective, pervasive and lasting tool. It is not exorbitant to say that Quran is a fully artistic book in terms of formation, structure, content and meaning; otherwise it could not have such a viable impact on human society (Sadeq pour Firuz Abad et al, 2013). The Holy Quran contains no explicit verse about art and its value, but there are artistic verses. Since the Holy Quran and Islam invite to things that come from human nature such as the desire for beauty, and use artistic styles to attract more people by innate elements, so the Holy Quran should address the beauty of art and its value in some way. Some of the verses in this field are as follows:

Table 1: Some of the verses of Holy Quran in conjunction with the artistic atmosphere for human conduct, source: the author.

<p>[Alms] of those who spend their wealth in God's way are like a grain that grows seven clusters, each of which has hundred grains. And God manifold it for everyone he wants to, and God is broad and wise (Holy Quran, Surah Baqarah, part 3, verse 261).</p>	<p>مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ فِي كُلِّ سَنَابِلَةٍ مِائَةٌ حَبَّةٌ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يُضَاعِفُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ</p>
<p>It is the God's color (that makes us believe) and what better color than the color of God (faith)? And we worship him (Holy Quran, Surah Baqarah, part one, verse 138).</p>	<p>صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً ۗ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ</p>
<p>Acts of those who disbelieve in God are like ashes that are ruined in intense hurricane and their efforts have no result. This is the same aberration (and regret) away from (the doctrine of salvation) (Holy Quran, Sura Ibrahim, part 13, verse 18).</p>	<p>مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ ۖ أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَرَمَادٍ اشْتَدَّتْ بِهِ الرِّيحُ فِي يَوْمٍ عَاصِفٍ ۗ لَا يَقْدِرُونَ مِمَّا كَسَبُوا عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ ۗ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الضَّلَالُ الْبَعِيدُ</p>
<p>And the word infidelity (and daemon) is like an evil tree not rooted in the ground and falls on the ground and (soon dries) has no stability and survival (Holy Quran, Sura Ibrahim, part 13, verse 26).</p>	<p>وَمَثَلُ كَلِمَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ كَشَجَرَةٍ خَبِيثَةٍ اجْتُثَّتْ مِنْ فَوْقِ الْأَرْضِ مَا لَهَا مِنْ قَرَارٍ</p>

The Holy Quran is artistic in terms of rhetoric, phonetics, orthography and design, archeology and aesthetics, fiction, colors, etc. Beauty has undoubtedly been the main axis of Islamic art since the advent of Islam. Due to preservation of Holy Quran and extraordinary holiness to this Book of God by Muslims, calligraphy could portray a sublime piece of Islamic art in books and internal and external views of religious and residential buildings (Saremi. et al, 2011).

Essence of religious art and Islamic art

The religious art is an art with religious impacts which remind human of God and uplift the spirit. Whether or not this art has emerged with religious theme or by the followers of a religion, it is called "holy art" by some experts because it leads to the transcendence of spirit. Any art with a religious theme is religious art, but any holy art is not necessarily religious. The religious and holy art is an art in which the divine presence is felt (Fahimifar, 2009). To call an art holy, it is not enough that it is derived from spiritual truth, but its formal language must be evidence for the same source... Only an art whose form reflects the spiritual insight of a particular religion is worthy of such adjective (Burckhardt, 2013). Indeed, Islamic art is nothing more than the reflection of spirit and probably the Quranic revelation in the material world. World, like human, is the embodiment and manifestation of God. In traditional societies, any aspect of life, including art and craft, is relevant to spiritual principles. In fact, arts and techniques are among the most important and direct areas for manifestation of tradition. In the traditional view, human and the universe can be understood, in a sense, as the creature of holy art (Nasr, 1991). The original feature of art in the Islamic civilization is the discharge of vices and willingness to virtues. Based on these specific features, Islamic artists have developed new designs and have made memories and works that stepped across the eternity border. This feature is present in all the post-Islam arts. The architecture of mosques, arabesque ornaments, artistic motifs of the Quran verses and miniature are examples of this holy universe and the result of the fusion of art with religious sentiments and the product of holy revelations and manifestations in the eyes of heart (Salmanian, 2009).

Art with a religious content

Religion and art are closely related (Kelly, 2004). In religion, human and art have been always been intertwined. According to Hegel, humans have tried to create art since the dawn of time and generally art has been mixed with religion (Gat and Lopes, 2005). Both pure art and religion are rooted in the heavenly souls of human and aim to remove dust from the mirror of the soul and evolve and preserve human. In the interaction between the two, art contributes to a clearer and deeper understanding of religion, and religion leads to the enrichment and intellectual promotion of art (Khargani, 2010). Islamic art does not owe its beauty to ethnic genius but to Islam, the beauty of Islamic art, in other words, the beauty that naturally comes from Islam is transferred to the environment (Burckhardt, 1991). According to Burckhardt, religious art establishes a link between both material and immaterial worlds, a Muslim artist achieves an elusive source by connecting to that world and then manifests what he sees into his works by drinking of that origin (Sartipi poor, 2008). Some commentators believe that Islamic art transfers the contents of the divine and Islamic concepts. Thus art must serve Islamic teachings and guidance of the public to be called Islamic. In other words, "religious art whether enjoying the style of abstraction and expression of mystery, symbolism and allegory or

demonstrates them through forms and figurative images, or expresses them through representation of nature and pure reality, it is an aesthetic experience of the holy and this feature is the essence of any definition of religious art" (Rahnavard, 2013).

Geometric art (geometry is the secret of the truth of God's justice).

Creation of the universe has been realized on the basis of geometry and cosmic laws of orderliness and proportion. The geometry of universe in the manifestation cycle of creation points to the order and size in the creation of the world and the unity of all parts of the world through the laws of similarity, symmetry, proportion, proportion, harmony and balance (Akbari et al, 2010). Geometry is the secret of "unity of being" across multiplicity and degrees of existence, and the flow of unity at all levels of the universe is the origin of this glorious and regulated order at all levels of the universe (Afifi, Abolala, 2011).

- God has decreed a size for everything (Surah Talagh/3).
- The reservoirs of everything are only with us, but we do not fall down except to a certain size (Alhajar/21).
- And the sun (is also a sign for them) that is moving steadily towards its resort; this is the measurement of almighty God (Yasin/38).
- Of course, we have created anything in sufficient quantities!
- The one who measured and guided (ALa'ala/3).

The prohibition of decorating and iconography in mosques and religious places is inferred directly from the Quran verses. That is why Islamic artists apply enough precision in imitating these forms (The Dictionary of Art, 1996: V. 1996).

Table 2: Some of the works of art with a focus on Islamic concepts, Source: 2004 by The Metropolitan Museum of Art of Art.



Monotheism, the axis of Islamic art

Since monotheism is the first principle and axis of Islamic beliefs, its reflection in Islamic art has made "unity" the pillar of Islamic art. The aesthetics of Islamic art is formed based on the multiplicity in unity and unity in multiplicity, which implies unity. The circle, as a symbol of the universe, whose center is the creator of the world, is the central figure of decorating (in Islamic tiling, Shamsheh is a crystallization of the aesthetic of this feature). A circular shape directs the viewer's look from scattering to a single point: its centers. The aesthetic rules of religious arts are formed according to their beliefs. Islamic art is not necessarily taken from the Quran and hadith. Islamic art is not the art of Islamic states and territories. However, most of the Islamic works of art were formed during the stability of these states and they owe their prosperity to these states. The first proposition and the last exhibition of Islamic art is monotheism. Islamic art is a continuum from form to sign and from sign to a stable unity where motifs are faded, and Ideas are involved. In the Islamic art, form, content and media have a lower priority than wisdom since unity in multiplicity narrates the unity of God (Mahdavinejad, 2012).

The symbolic language of Islamic art

Islam art is a vast treasure of deep mystical meaning and divine wisdom because it is rooted in the profound foundations of spiritual and divine thought. The language of Islamic art is symbolic and mysterious. These secrets and symbols carry the inherent meaning of this art and the only way to check the meaning of Islamic art is to review these icons and symbols. In fact, one can say that the symbolic language is a language that art adopts in religious civilizations through which expresses its concepts (Shahbazi et al, 2012).

Table 3: Some of the works of art that decorated with Quranic designs

Façade of Aya Sofia Mosque, Turkey	Interior view of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Isfahan, Iran	Façade of Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Naghsh Jahan Square, Isfahan, Iran
		
(Dal & ÖCAL, 2013)	(Sobouti & Rajabionun, 2014)	

Islamic identity in the works of architecture.

Various theories are proposed on the Islamic identity of built environment in architecture. Some architects suggest that Islamic identity is based on the knowledge obtained of human, cosmos and the relationship between them. According to them, Islam proposes this problem in two fields of vision and value. On the one hand, it offers a specific definition of the universe and the role and purpose of human, and on the other hand, it sets special rules for all affairs in the individual and social life. Meanwhile, the relationship between human and himself, between human and others, between human and nature and between human and God are among the ways to achieve human excellence and evolution (Hojjat, 1999). In other words, the religion – the world-view basis that defines the nature and human relationship with nature - affects the formation of the human works, forms culture and cultural values, defines dominant functions of life environment, and influences the course of a nation. While one can consider religious identity as a sort of identity, it should be noted that other types of identity are influenced by religious identity which displays the thinking and world-view of society (Okhavat, 2013).

Identity indices of Islamic art and architecture

Islamic values can and should play an important role in the physical manifestations. Values and principles governing Islamic environments include:

Table 4: Islamic values can and should play an important role in the physical manifestations. Values and principles governing Islamic environments include:

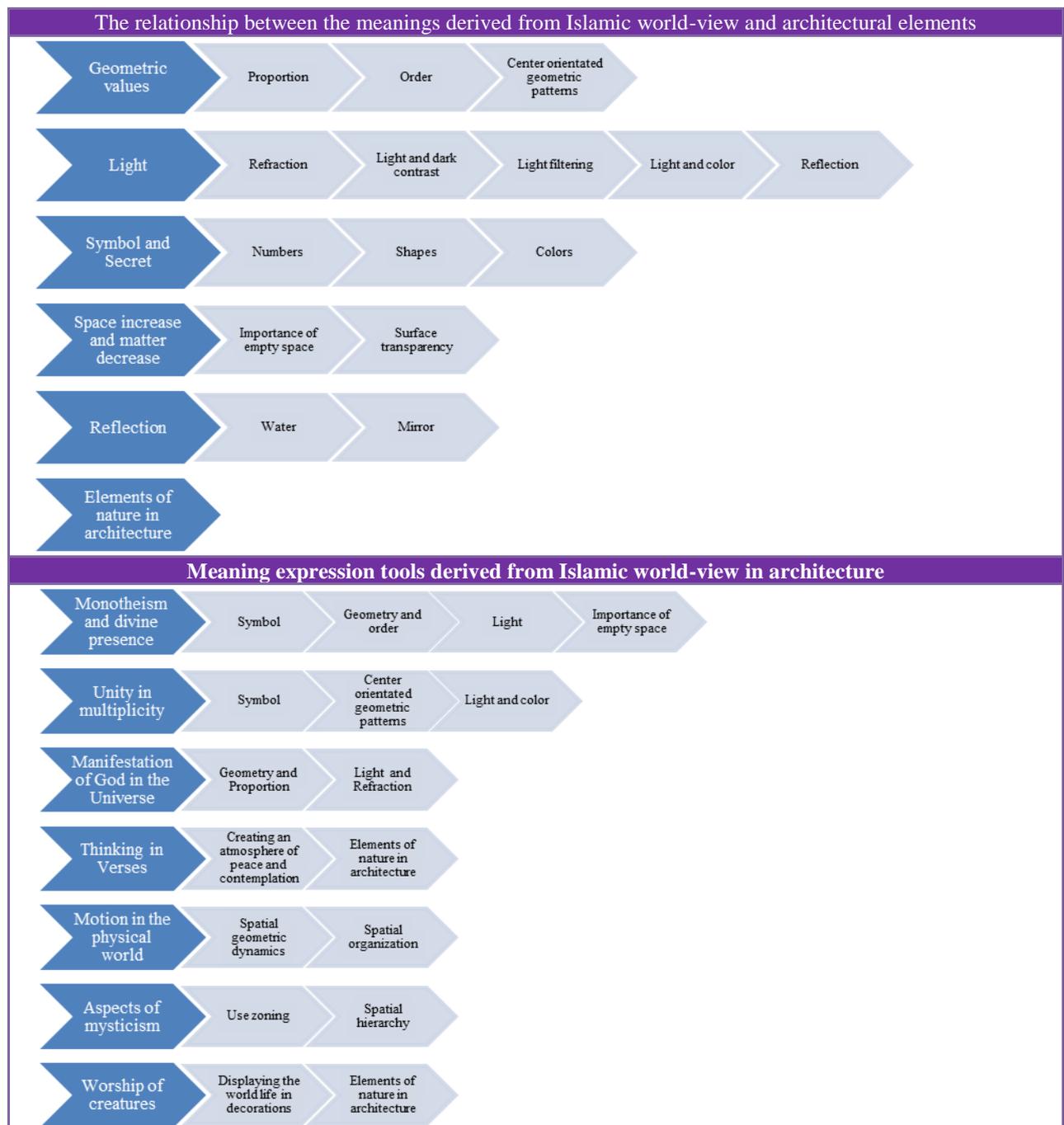
	<p>Balance: Balance (justice). Moderation is the basis of Islam and balance is the manifestation of justice. According to Allameh Taba tabai, justice literally means moderation between the high and the low and the intermediate between the extremes. He believes that the most luxurious place is where moderation is present .Balance in a built environment includes: 1. Proper location of environmental elements and their optimal positioning beside each other. 2. Optimal fit between the dimensions of space and body and mental and physical features of human. 3. Establishing a connection between nature and the built environment 4. Balancing functions responsive to human needs (Naghizadeh, 2008).</p>
	<p>Beauty: in every community, aesthetic standards stem from the world-view of that community. Beauty degrees are divided into three groups: sensible, rational and spiritual (Naghizadeh, 2006). The rational and spiritual beauty is the most memorable and most valuable beauty.</p>
	<p>Unity in multiplicity: The unity shows that everything is dependent on God. The unity the designer or architect manifests in the body of a building or artwork can lead to a display of unity. Thus in the hierarchy of unity, the body unity of an apace will become the basis for unity in the society. In addition to meeting human needs, this unity can cause non-uniformity because it indicates a lack of balance. One of the effects of observing the unity in multiplicity principle is variety. Moreover, a necessary tool for achieving this principle is to observe geometric laws and designs by designers and architects.To this end, and to achieve unity in multiplicity in creating built environments based on Islamic principles and teachings, the unity between Islamic world-view values and the principles governing the theoretical basis of designs must be considered. (Naghizadeh, 2008).</p>
	<p>Harmony: Harmony refers to adjusting the relationship between several objects in order to achieve their goal. The harmony principle should be followed for success of a plan. In the true religion of Islam, harmony is seen between built works and the universe. On the other hand, the construction of objects according to their nature brings a kind of harmony and beauty. By following the teachings of Islam, Muslims have always tried to consider harmony of the construction of the physical environment with religious values and somehow coordinate form with function to achieve the unity of the whole collection (Naghizadeh, 2008).</p>
	<p>Geometry: Any architecture design is originally based on geometry. Both deal with the properties of lines, surfaces and shapes in space, so any analysis of a work of architecture is partly geometry probing (Alasad,1997). Muslims have always considered geometry as significant knowledge. Geometry in Islamic sciences is closely related the <i>size</i> or <i>measure</i> concept in the Quran. When creating Islamic art, <i>Engineer</i> or <i>geometrician</i> recreates the forms of the world of forms in both abstract and material dimensions. The abstract dimension shows itself in abstract forms and the material dimension in the form of architecture ... which is somewhat an interpretation and symbol of meaning (Bolkhari Qehi, 2009).</p>
<p>Figure 1: Imam Mosque, Isfahan, Iran.</p>	

The (Islamic) mean reflectance in architectural design

From the perspective of the Islamic world-view, the phenomena of the universe have two faces of internal and external, or form and meaning. In the field of art and architecture, paying attention to internal aspect of artistic phenomenon

leads to an approach in architectural called ideationalism. This approach from the perspective of "meaning" plays an important role in the ideationalist attitude.

Table 5: Meaning expression tools derived from Islamic world-view in architecture and the relationship between the meanings derived from Islamic world-view and architectural elements, Source: (Bemanian and Azimi, 2010).



How to achieve Islamic identity in architecture

To offer a work with Islamic identity, it is necessary that the architect, at the next step, offers a practical technique and method based on the practical wisdom of Islam "Sharia" and follows the five provisions (obligatory, forbidden, recommended, detestable, and permissible) to take steps in the course of justice. Next, the artist and architect must have talent and experience in the desired art so that his artistic Ijtihad can be a process of transcendental ideas (existential facts) to the artistic direction of Ijtihad (existential justice), that is, putting everything in its place (through experience, practice and talent required), and finally can create a work of art. Figure 1 shows different stages of this process and explains its stages which is based on the principle of separation of theoretical, practical statements and examples.

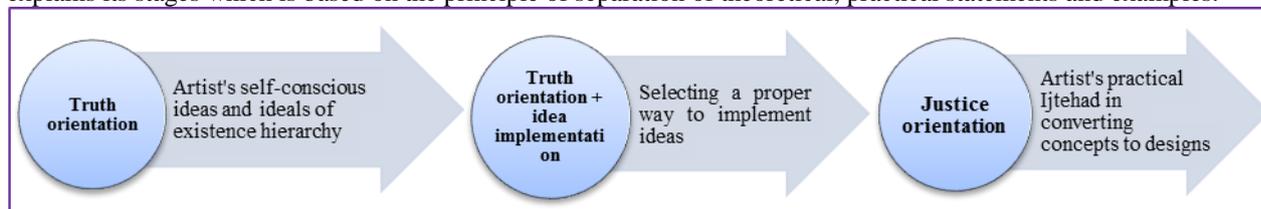


Figure 2: Creation process of an artwork with identity (transcendental) from the perspective of Islam, Source: Noghrekar and Manan Raeesi, 2012).

The important thing in the provided process is that in each of the three stages of this diagram, there is a range of different degrees based on the achievement of the objectives of each stage. One can imagine that its result is the relativity of the output realization of this diagram as "Islamic identity in architectural works" (Noghrekar, et al, 2012)

CONCLUSIONS

According to studies on the influence of Islamic texts on art and architecture, it can be concluded that two groups of critics came to different conclusions in this respect. Some argue that to create an artistic Islamic monument, the artist or an architect has not to be a Muslim or live in a Muslim country or enjoy the Islamic culture, but he can be of any society and benefit from his intelligence and reach a fine work by following the voice of his heart and practice. Another group of commentators believe that culture has a direct connection with the works of architecture, and the presence of the artist and his works are influenced by the social environment. According to the surveys, it can be concluded that culture (shared social values) and public opinions are important factors in creating a work of art and architecture. In fact, artworks are the result of internal (personal) nature and the governing (public) culture in every society (Islamic and other religions). Artists in Islamic countries, by accepting the true religion of Islam and using their Islamic teachings and enjoying arabesque designs, geometric designs, Islamic texts, architectural elements (geometry, order, hierarchy, considering people's needs (emotional, religious and economic), religious motifs, etc. manifest their culture in art and architecture monuments. A prime example of that can be found on the walls and body of buildings and Islamic artworks in Iran. On the other hand, Greek, Egyptian, and Christian artists create their works with their own cultural motifs.

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