

# Wajib-ul Arz and Sajra-Nasib: A Study of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Village Documents in Himachal Pradesh

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Available online at: www.isca.in, www.isca.me

Received 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015, revised 13<sup>th</sup> July 2016, accepted 5<sup>th</sup> September 2016

### **Abstract**

In the present paper I want to analyze the Wajib-ul-arz and Sajra Nasib. Wajib-ul-arz and Sajra- Nasib are important for the study of village records of Himachal Pradesh in the colonial period. Since records prior to colonial period do not survive we are in the dark conveying the exact nature of village documents except that Mughals have great emphasizes in maintaining the village records for revenue purpose which were largely maintained in Persian. Wajib-ul arz is the authentic record of the villages having details of the villages inhabitant along with the details of their castes composition. The style of writing the Wajib-ul-arz differs from area to area. They were considered the most authentic village level documents, not only in colonial period but the practice of maintaining these records in the forms of wajib-ul arz and sajra nasib still prevailed in Himachal Pradesh with the difference that earlier it were maintained in Urdu, but now the language used is Hindi. When Britishers occupied the Punjab Hills they tried to learn the customs of the area. Besides for fixing revenue when the settlement reports were prepared at first at village level wajib-ul-arz were prepared. Wajib-ul arz provides detailed information of land, nature of village and the customs related to the appropriation of the common village grazing, begar to be furnished by the different castes of the village. The documents also contain account of the duties or the nature of works performed by various castes of the village like Lohar, Gujjar, Rajputs and the Brahmin. Documents also contains information pertaining to the sannads granted by the Britishers to the Rajas of the Hill States elaborated there powers and position. These Wajib-ul-arz were infect prepared by the Britishers, but under the supremacy of the Raja of the area. For example the Wajib-ul arz of the Bilaspur area were written under the Raja of the Kehloor. Another important village level document in Himachal Pradesh is Sajra Nasib. Sajra nasib provides detailed accounts of the information pertaining to the establishment of the village, its inhabitants, its population etc. It provides a descriptive list of the persons and of their families along with the division of land among the family members along with their names.

Keywords: Wajib-ul arz, Sajra- Nasib, Village documents, Village customs.

### Introduction

The present paper is the study of village level documents Wajibul arz and Sajra Nasb. Wajib-ul arz and Sajra Nasib are important for the study of village records of Himachal Pradesh in the colonial period. In the medieval period villages formed the basic unit of revenue assessment. In the Punjab region village revenue records of the Mughal territories hardly survived. However, in the introduction of the wajib-ul arz (village papers) prepared by the settlement officers at the time of British accession it is recorded that the data for wajib-ul arz was prepared out of the Rovkar Haja, Sajra nasab, Jamabandhi, mufassal mizanha-I Ragister mougian inticaatl, Milan Ragwa, Jamavasalbagi, Fahris muafit va panshan, Naqsha istahkak avnoshi, Rovkar tashkhis Muamla zamin, Robkar bach Muamla khatagibla Wajib-ul arj, Robkar habub dehi, shajra kishatwar (Wajib-ul arz (1914) of Mauza Bassi Pargana Kotkehloor, kept in Record room of Deputy Commissioner Bilaspur). It clearly suggests that under the Mughal and the Sikhs various types of village accounts were maintained out of which colonial state prepared wajib-ul arz. Richard Temple, the settlement officer of the Jullandhar in Punjab mentions that he based his findings on *mauzians* dating from the Mughal period in his early assessment of villages of Jullandhar<sup>1</sup>. H.H.Wilson defines *mauzian* as village register<sup>2</sup>.

Modern Himachal state was earlier part of undivided Punjab and chiefly Hill States. Prior to the British occupation of the area, the state was governed by the Mughals and the Sikhs. It is interesting that Gustafson and Kessinges argue that Mughal and Sikh records have little detailed information about the social and economic history of rural area<sup>2</sup>. The British land revenue system in Punjab, although similar to the Mughal and the Sikhs but it is different in one way that the British made the revenue records into a permanent record of rights on land as well as a source of information for the assessment and collection of revenue<sup>3</sup>. However Gustafson the Kenneth Jone's does not hold good for the introductory remarks of the wajib-al arz (mentioned above) clearly indicate that wajib-ul arz were prepared by the British on the basis of already existing detailed village registers of the previous Mughal and Sikh records.

The only thing that British seem to have done was to consolidate various types of records (as mentioned above) at one place in the form of *wajib-ul arz*.

When British occupied Punjab they tried to learn village customs, ceremonies and collective rights on village commons. Wajib-ul arz provides a consolidated account of the villages and their customs. Wajib-ul arz gives a detail account about the customs and rules followed by the villagers of that area. Temple defines wajib-ul arz as, "Wajib hona, to be necessary, worthy proper, necessary to be discharge (duties) ul arz, fit to be represented"<sup>4</sup>. Wilson also explains the term, wajib-ul arz as, "fit for or worthy of representation." He elaborates that the, "Concept of wajib-ul arz was in use in North west provinces. It is a written agreement in the north-west provinces, it designates what is considered to be the most important of the documents relating to the village administration describing the established mode of paying the government revenue, the actual shares or holding, whether held in severalty or in common, and how separation and re-allotment takes place, the powers and privileges of the Lambardars and how elected, what extra items of collection are recognized the rules regarding fruit and timber trees on the estate, and how irrigation is maintained, the appropriate of waste lands the village servants and their fees and the pay of the village watchmen: it should be in fact, a complete view of the organization of the village and is to be attested by the signature of all the Lambardars and as many the share holders as choose to sign, and by the signature of the patwari and kanungo: it should be read aloud in open court in the hearing of the subscribing parties and the settlement officer, and be approved and signed also by him: the term seems to have been superseded of late years by khervat".

Wilson correlates the term *wajib-ul arz* with *khervat* which was according to him, also a record of the particulars of the administration of a village, specifying the names of the occupants and all circumstances connected with their occupancy<sup>3</sup>. However in the region of Himachal Pradesh I do not come across the usage of *khervat*.

The term wajib-ul arz was in usage from the Mughal period. While referring to various pre colonial records in the list of 13 documents consulted by the record office was also wajib-ul arz. Yasin's eighteenth century manual defines wajib-ul arz as, "something whose representation is necessary. In case representation is not made, he is held guilty by the Government later. Thus it can be said that necessary demands are written down in the wajib-ul arz". Thus Yasin clearly mentions wajibul arz were Memorandums pertaining to any government issues/matters. Such two famous Memorandums (wajib-ul arz) of the Mughals do survive. One such Memorandum (wajib-ul arz) is preserved in Bibliotheque Nationel Paris pertains to Guirat administration when Prince Shahjahan was the governor. Other such Memorandums (wajib-ul arz) again of Shahjahan's period (1635) on 'Chitang river.' The document is preserved in the collection of Balkishan Brahman's letters.

The importance of wajib- ul- arz is well explained by Nasserwanji Driver while writing about the Zamindars of Sambalpur in Orissa, he comments, "To-day the Zamindars of Sambalpur are more or less like those in C.P rather than like the Zamindars of Bengal or North Orissa. The agreement with them is not as per rules laid down by any Act but is expressed in administrative papers known as village wajib-ul arz, tehsil wajib-ul arz or taluga wajib-ul arz. These papers deal respectively with: (a) local peculiarities (b) matter common to the tract, and (c) things like custom of succession or of maintenance, service etc". Nasserwanji Driver's testimony attests that wajib-ul arz as village papers and village customary records were recognized during the 19<sup>th</sup> century across northern region of British dominion. Justifying the importance of wajibul-arz Whartoson wrote that, "The entry regarding agreement in a wajib-ul arz holds good during the period of the settlement in which it is made and becomes inoperative when the settlement has come to end"<sup>7</sup>.

Mathew Nelson says that, "The first set of wajib-ul-arz (village administration paper), prepared in the early 1830s, had identified rights and customs in each Punjab village"8. Neeldari Bhattacharya mentions that, "The first set of wajib-ul arz (village administration paper), prepared in the early 1850s, had identified rights and *customs* in each Punjab village. In the 1860s, the first series of riwaj-i-ams of tribal customs, as distinguished from village customs, were prepared"9. In context to Himachal I could not trace the custom of writing riwai-i-am. It seems, in the region wajib-ul arz continued to be the only authentic record of the village administration even for the tribal dominant Gujjar villages. It is interesting that Neeldari Bhattacharya's testimony suggests that tribals remained outside the frame of wajib-ul arz. However wajib-ul arz of Gujjar dominated villages suggests that at least settled tribals were very much part of the wajib-ul arz. It is more likely that probably migrant tribals communities remained outside the fold and governed by riwaj-i am. Methew Nelson argues that, "In Punjab local customs were recorded in the documents like Ikrar nama or wajib-ul arz (Village administration papers)"9. When Wajibul-arz were written Alison writes, "Those are village administration papers which were directed to be prepared by Regulation VII of 1822. These papers have been received in evidence under S.35 of the Indian Evidence Act which says that an entry in any public or other official book, register, or record stating a fact in issue or relevant fact, and made by a public servant in the discharge of his official duties, or by any other person in performance of a duty specially enjoined by law of the country in which such book, register or record is kept, is itself a relevant fact" 10. Adds Alison that, "Douie (1899), for his part referred to the wajib-ul arz as the centre piece of the settlement report as a whole, mostly because, through its compendium of local habits, norms, and regulations, 'it intended to show the whole of the constitution of the village. After more than forty years of unrivalled preeminence (1822-65), however, the wajibul arz was joined and, eventually, superseded by another, even more important (but slightly different) compendium of customs.

This compendium was known as the riwaj-i am or the digest of 'tribal' custom. And, like the wajib-ul arz, the riwaj-i-am intended to capture the whole of the constitution of each village through a detailed enumeration of the rules, regulations, and 'customs' pertaining to the owner ship and inheritance of land" 11. Majid Siddiqi tried to correlate the term wajib-ul arj with Abul Fazl's arznamcha and iltimas<sup>11</sup>. Abul Fazl used the term arz-namchas as the statement of sums forwarded to court by the collectors of the imperial domains<sup>12</sup>. However Abul Fazl's arznamcha's seem little different from wajib-ul arz as wajib-ul arz includes other than revenue receipts/heads account of the village customs and customary rights of land ownership, rights held in common irrigation facilities, begar performed etc. Instead it appear that the term *wajib-ul arz* as Memorandum was for village records for probably the collected papers were to be presented to the settlement officer as the seals on the Sajra Nasib indicate- seal reads: (regular settlement Riyasat Kehloor).

In the hilly regions of Himachal the Britishers, instead of governing the territories directly allotted the *sannads* to the hill chiefs and they continue to enjoy full sovereign status in their states. In these sovereign states of hilly Rajas of Himachal Pradesh initially *wajib-ul arz* got prepared at the behest and under the supervision of the Raja of that particular area. This practice of writing the *wajib-ul arz* is still in use with the difference that now its language is Hindi, while earlier *wajib-ul arz* are in Urdu.

It seems of maintaining village record under the head wajib-ul arz is in vogue in other parts of Northern India. The Indore District Gazetteer, 1968 Madhya Pradesh refers to wajib-ul arz as important village documents in pre-independence India and mentions, "Till the abolition of the right of intermediaries the right of residents of village in unoccupied land and its produce were defined in wajib-ul-arz. Now the land revenue code 1959 has directed the preparation of a Nistar Patrak for rights over unoccupied land in a village belonging to the state and a wajib-ul arz for right over lands belonging to other bhumiswamis" 13.

The pattern of writing wajib-ul arz is varied in Himachal from district to district. The wajib-ul arz of Una district is quite different in the context from the Bilaspur district largely because Una distict was part of then Hoshiarpur district of British dominion; while area of modern Bilaspur continued to remained under the control of Rajas of Bilaspur. However the broad features remained largely the same. It contains the following information: i. Firstly, in wajib-ul arz states the area of the village in Kanals or Marley including the Shamlat land (Land under the direct control of the State). ii. Right of grazing on Shamlat land. iii. It provides detail about production. iv. Information about the barren land of the village. v. Mentions the Abnoshi land means having the irrigation facility. vi. Discusses water resources of the village. vii. Customs related to the burd baramad (Land erosion due to flood), viii. It provides the detail of the right of the villagers on the cultivated Land. ix. Rights of other communities means other than cultivators which also includes the nature of *begar* (forced labour) to be performed by the villagers. x. Mention about common resources of the villages like forests and nature of jobs pursued by various communities of the village.

Wajib-ul arz of Mawa Sindhia which was then part of Hoshiarpur district of British dominion elaborated here:

# Customs of Village Mawa Sindhia, serial number 161, tehsil Una, District Hoshiarpur

**Shamlat Land:** The whole land of the village was measured and named as *arazi*. It was written that in our village total land which is Shamlat, (under direct control of the Government) is 20803 kanal and 3.15 marle. Other land is 20803 kanal and 15 marley which is cultivated land and the cultivators have to pay the revenue for their crops. The revenue of the Shamlat land of our village is as below. For establishing a Gharat (a machine in water) two rupees eight anna, For eight kilo Magoes or Lakh trees or to sell grass or wood total revenue is twenty five rupees. And any other revenue from the shamlat land will be distributed among all the partners of the land.

**Grazing right on Shamlat Land**: In our village at shamlat Land the villagers having their own land or not having land have the right to graze the animals without prior permission, but the animals from another villages are not allowed to graze in this village.

**Right about the production**: Now no revenue is made by production.

**Right about the destruction**: In this village on the Government land all repair work will be look after by the Nambardar.

**Abnoshi Land:** In our village there is no water source or well is for irrigation. The word *Abnoshi* (word used for irrigation.) is used for irrigation. That's why it is the right of all the cultivators to construct a well on their land for irrigation if they have need for it.

Customs regarding the Panchaki, Pond, River or Natural resources: In our village, there is a well at Chah vakaya for *abnoshi* which is used both by Hindu and Muslims. But when the Muslims were taking water from this well then the Hindus should have to wait. And if the Hindu was taking water then Muslim should have to wait. Other castes such as Chamar, Chuhra, Julaha etc they all have to take water from the Swan River and not from this well. And the cattle of our village have a pond for water and they can also use the river Swan.

Custom about the Burd Baramad: In our village there always occurred soil erosion due to the flood in the Swan River and khad (tributary) Kuthera and Mawa. If the fertilizer land of any owner floated away due to flood, the lose should have to bear by

the owner of the land and nothing is paid for this lose. Here the word "Burd" is used for the floated land.

Right of the Kashatkar (cultivators) on Land, Trees and Fertilizers: On the trees of Mango, Tuni and Jamun the right are also divided among the cultivators and the owner of the land. Mangoes will be equally distributed among the owner and the cultivators but the other fruit trees can be used by the cultivator. Cultivators (Mujaran) have no right on the trees but if they need wood for their house then after getting the permission from the owner of the land they can be able to get the tree. Mujaran or cultivators have to cult on the land. He has to give ½ to the owner of the land.

Rights and Responsibilities of the other castes: i. Lohar: He has to prepare tools with iron for the land cultivation, ii. Tarkhan: He has to prepare weapons with the wood or iron for cultivation. (Iron and wood will be given by the owner), iii. Chamar: Have to do the work on Shamlat land. Repair the old shoes. And took grass and wood for the owners. He used to go with the land owner to pick the luggage. He has to give two pair of shoes in the marriages and four pair to the lambardar in a year. He have to pick the died animals. Nothing is taken for the leather of the ox and cow but for the leather of the buffaloes the chamars have to paid one rupees to the owner and if the died buffalo is of other villagers then eight annas. If the animal of the neighboring village died in our village then the chamars of our village have their right on it and if our animal died at another then the chamar of that village have their right on it. iv. Dhashali (Patal of leaf, plate maker): At the occasion of the marriage and death Duna (leaf bowl) or patal (leaf plate) will have to be given to the owner. v. Tailor: They do the job of stitching the clothes. vi. Gajar: Wash the clothes. (The caste Gajar seems to use for Gujjar).

The things which were given to these castes elaborated here:

**Dhashali** was paid 4 paisa for 25 patals and one rupee for 100 patals and one time meal also.

**Hazam** was paid 5 ser grain and at the occasion of marriage and death food and whatever will be paid in cash he accepted it.

**Kumhar** was given 10 ser standing crops or 5 ser grain. He was not paid in cash.

**Gajar** was also given 10 ser standing crops and five ser grains at the occasion of marriage and death. At the time of marriage he was given four anna in cash.

**Tailor** was also given 10 ser standing crops and five ser grain. Four anna in cash. But all depend on the will of the owner if he will take the services of these casts he will have to pay all this.

**Rights on the Forests, unpopulated land and the stone caves**: In this village forests and road are in government land. There are some trees that cannot be used without prior permission.

Other customs related to the *Kashatkars*: All the land without the owner is the land of the Government. If at any part of the land gold, iron or kerosene oil comes out then this will be also of the government. There is also description about the land 1. Plain 2. Fati means floated land 3. Standing land. The owner has the right to grow the trees or any other thing on the land. The fishes can be caught from the khad by hand but for more fishes prior permission is required. If the Gharat will be washed away due to the heavy rain then at 50 metre up or down *gharat* can be prepared again (*Wajib ul arz* (1914) of village Mawa Sindhia Tehsil Una, district Hoshiarpur). At the end of the *wajib ul arz* there will be signatures of the inhabitants of the village, to make the assurance that the customs are acceptable to all the villagers.

The details of the wajib ul arz of mauza Bilaspur pargana Bilaspur which fall under Raja of Bilaspur's dominion are given below: The wajib-ul arz of Bilaspur however have the same pattern but detail descriptions of Namardars Zamidars for the Raja of Bilaspur have been defined in it. Nature of Begar from different castes clearly mentioned. The pattern of the Bilaspur is minutely described here. At the top of the wajib-ul arz there is stated the name of the Raja of Bilaspur along with the name of the village which is written as "Wajib ul arz of Mauza Bilaspur Pargana Bilaspur Tehsil Bilaspur District Shimla" Then the name of the Raja Rai Sahib Miya Amar Singh is stated. The language is as such "the revenue of Rs 38 and 9 anna was received from the area of the revenue of 90 rupees 14 anna. Now the repair of the road on the begar is stopped. Therefore the Kharif crops are decided to be taken." Then the customs related to the Shamlat land was explained as such.

Shamlat Land: In the area no land is Shamlat except the edge which is in the fields. All the mountains, rivers etc and barren grazing land is under the sovereignty of the Raja. With the permission, land can be cultivated. The revenue will be charged from the third crops.

Grazing Right on Shamlat land: All the rights are with the Raja. Villagers can graze their animals there.

Right about the production: No revenue is from this

Custom regarding the Garbage: No revenue.

Customs regarding Aavnoshi: Nothing.

Customs about the Panchaki, Ponds and rivers or natural water resources: To use the Satlej and seer khad 10 rupees as najrana have to be paid although on other khads its 5 rupees.

**Customs regarding** *Burd Baramad*: If the land washed away by the flood in Satlej river or Seer *khad*(tributary) then except in special circumstances compensate will not be paid. But if the lose is major then on written request the compensation will be granted to the victim.

Customs related to the land and inhabitant: If a person died without heir then his whole land including his house will gone to the Raja Sahib. The forests were also under the control of the Raja Sahib and in the land if coal and oil is found then it will also be the Raja's possession.

**Rights of the kashatkaran**: *Kashatkar* were known as Marusi or *garmarusi*. Person having their own land known as *morusi* and who cultivated on the land of the others known as *garmoursi*. The right of the *mourises* (land holders) are also defined.

Customs related to the other castes having occupation other than cultivation: The work of the different castes like *Lohar*, *Tarkhan*, *Chima*, etc are defined.

Customs regarding the unpopulated land and the forests: All such type of the land was under the control of *alamalik* or Raja Sahib.

**Customs related to the other persons**: *Jaildar*: In the duties of *Jaildar* it has been elaborated that he might have to come to the royal darbar and give 5 rupees as *Nazrana*. He has to supervise the work of the *Nambardar* and *Patwari*. He has to give all report about the roads and land which come under his *jagir*.

*Nambardar*: He has to give 2 rupees as *najrana* to the royal *darbar*. He has to submit all detail of the crops and after getting the revenue he has to give receipt. If any scandal occurred in the area then he have to inform about it to the police station. He helped all Government servants to fulfill their duties. At the time of the royal marriages he has to arrange all domestic things for the palace.

**Chowkidar:** Chowkidars gave one rupees as *najrana* to the Raja Sahib at festival of Dussarra.

About the roads it has been elaborated that the roads were prepared on begar earlier but now it is prepared by the labour. Repair was also done on begar, but it stopped now. Begar was essential in the hill states that's why it is also in wage in the Bilaspur(stated in the wajib ul-arz). Begar was compulsory for everybody and each have to serve for one month as a begari outside the state. Some were exempted from the begar. Then form of begar taken from all castes has been elaborated in the wajib-ul arz of the Bilaspur. It was also ended by the signature of the Nambardar and Jaildar.

The difference between the Mawasindhia wajib-ul arz and Bilaspur wajib-ul arz is quite interesting since the Bilaspur remained under direct sovereignty of the Raja of Bilaspur that's why the wajib-ul arz of this district was written under the Raja of Bilaspur as stated above. However Hoshiarpur was under the direct control of the Britishers so the wajib-ul arz of Mawa-Sindhia was written on behalf of the villagers it is written with time that such and such customs of "our village" but Bilaspur wajib-ul arz seems to have written at the behest of the Raja of Bilaspur. However, in both the documents the consent of the

villagers was crucial. It is interesting that in the custom No 5 which is related to the ponds and natural resources, a detail description is given in the Mawa sindhia's *wajib-ul arz* on the pattern of usage of water by the Hindus and the Muslim communities but in Bilaspur a brief summary statement of the tax or *Najrana* to be paid to the Raja for making *Garats*, no description of community wise use of water from the wells and ponds is provided. This shows how, in the jurisdiction of British dominion community division was highlighted.

Bilaspur wajib-ul arz provides all minutes details including the responsibilities of the villagers towards the Raja and Rani Sahiba of the Bilaspur. In Mawa Sindhia there is no description of the duties & responsibilities of the officials is given. But in both there is clearly land out description of the village and its inhabitants, their rights and their duties, etc.

**Sajra Nasib:** Other type of the village documents in Himachal Pradesh, which are invariably clubbed with wajib-ul-arz are sajra nasib. Sajra-nasib is the details out the persons living in a village. Thus, Sajra nasibs contain a good deal of data and throws light on family structure, since 1849. It contains the demography of the entire village along with details of the founder of the village their castes, date of the foundation of a particular village, why the particular village was established and revenue claims of the village. From sajra nasib we can drive the pattern concerning the division of land between the father and son, or among brothers, etc. Thus sajra nasibs are mine of information to analyze caste-status, divisions of land whether a particular village is a single caste village or multiple castes village, rules/pattern of distribution of land among families etc. It is interesting that Sajra nasib only speak about the dominant castes and one silent about the other inhabitant of the Village.

**Sajra-nasib of Bilaspur District**: In sajra nasib first of all it was written the name of the Moza (village) and then the name of the District. As for example Moza Palsid, Tehsil and District Bilaspur. Then it was explained about the castes, who have firstly started to live and cultivate in that village, as such Moza Palsid was firstly established by Chachi Gujjars. The Patter is given in Table-1.

Here Chandel is the *gotra* of the Rajput Dynasty and the *Chechi* is the *Gotra* of the Gujjars who have started to live there firstly. It was also written in the *sajra nasib* that from where they came here and who are their ancestral. But in this *sajra nasib* they did not know from where they came. That's why it was written that they are living here from the very beginning as their forefather started to live here so all heirs have their possession on the land. This is the certificate which is given at the end of the *sajra nasib* of all villages. This *sajra nasib* is of the Bilaspur where the royal family have their hold after getting the sannads from the Britishers, This was the reason that the one part of the land is under the direct control of the Raja Bidhi Chand mentioned in this *sajra nasib* as Aala Malik.

### Table-1 Patter

Rajput Chandel	Gujjar Chechi	
No 1.	No 2	No 3
Aala Malik Raja Bidhi Chand	Jodho	Sahbhu
(which means the Raja is the	(Having two sons)	(Have two sons)
owner of one part of The land)	(Jita or Madho)	(Garibu, Sundhar)
	Jita have one son Bura and Madho have Natha.	Garibu two sons (Maw or Churu)
	Then Natha have Four sons named as Gndhi, Fandhi,	Sundher two sons Khano, Dhanu
	Fozu and Chaju.	

### Conclusion

Thus *wajib-ul arz* provides minute details related to the village and its customs to be adopted by villagers and *Sajra nasib* pertain to the genealogy of the dominant caste of the village. An in-depth study of the document would help us to understand the village structure and customs of the village in the region.

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