

# Hevajatantra

The *Hevajatantra* is the most important scripture of the *yoginītantra* class. Shortly after its appearance around 900 CE in East India (Davidson, 2004, 41), it engendered – or promoted in a codified form – a widespread and influential cult of its eponymous deity and his retinue; its teachings became of such authority that there were hardly any esoteric Buddhist authors who could afford to ignore them. While the text continued the antinomian tradition set out in the *Guhyasamājatantra* and the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālaśaṃvara*, it also introduced a number of innovations – most importantly the doctrine of the four blisses – and it is noted for skillfully blending the world of tantric ritual practice and non-esoteric Mahāyāna doctrine. Compared to the other emblematic *yoginītantra*, the *Herukābhīdhāna*, the *Hevajatantra* can be said to contain much more theological and philosophical material, showing a confident grounding in the Buddhist world.

The basic scripture was followed by vigorous exegesis in the form of further, explanatory scriptures, commentaries proper, and a large body of satellite texts. The *tantra* was translated into Chinese by \*Dharmapāla (Fahu [法護]) in 1055 CE and into Tibetan at roughly the same time by Gayādhara and 'Brog mi Shā kya ye shes (D 417–418/P 10; the two main chapters are numerated separately in the Derge edition). While until the advent of the Yuan dynasty it failed to gain momentum in China, the *Hevajatantra* inspired hundreds of further works in Tibet (Sobisch, 2008).

Judging from statuary and other material evidence, the teachings of the *Hevajatantra* were transmitted in some form to various parts of Southeast Asia (see Lobo, 1998, for the Khmer realm; for Sumatra, see Griffiths, 2014, 228–230, where the cult survived until the 14th century; Reichle, 2007, 139). That the *Hevajatantra* came to be the emblematic esoteric Buddhist scripture is suggested by the fact that the Śaiva exegete Jayaratha (*fl.* c. 1213–1236 CE) quoted it with approval, though without actually naming the text (e.g. *Tantrāloka* *viveka ad Abhinavagupta's Tantrāloka* 4.243; Shāstrī, 1921, 269; there are two or three further possible quotations).

The cult had among its initiates a number of monarchs and courtiers. In India, the ruler of Khasa, Aśokacalla is described as a worshipper of Hevajra on an inscription from Bodh Gaya dated 1194 CE by one of his dependents (Vidyavinoda, 1913–1914, 30). The Mongol rulers Godan and Qubilai were initiated by the Tibetan masters Sa skya paṇḍita (1182–1251 CE) and his nephew, 'Phags pa (1239–1280 CE) respectively (Willemsen, 1983, 16). A Čam inscription from 1194 CE (Finot, 1904, 973, 975) celebrating the military victory of Vidyānandana, the future king Sūryavarman, over a Khmer expedition, records the building of a Heruka temple (*śrīherukaharmya*), which could possibly have been a Hevajra place of worship.

The *Hevajatantra* was the first *yoginītantra* to be fully edited and translated by modern scholars. D.L. Snellgrove's (1959) pioneering work was slightly improved upon by G.W. Farrow and I. Menon (1992), and some progress towards a comprehensive critical edition, which remains one of the great desiderata of esoteric Buddhist studies, has been achieved by the awkwardly constituted but useful editions of R.S. Tripathi and T.S. Negi (2001; 2006). R.F. Meyer's German translation (2005–2006) is not based on such an effort. For the time being, it would seem that the text was transmitted in a fairly stable form, although signs of redaction and possibly slightly different recensions exist.

## Structure and Synopsis of Contents

The *Hevajatantra* consists of two main chapters (or “books”, “parts”) called *kalpas*, which are usually divided into 11 and 12 subchapters, and named “The Chapter of the Awakening of Vajragarbha” (who is the petitioner of most of the text) and “The Chapter of Illusion,” respectively. (Below the *kalpas* are indicated with upper case Roman I and II, the subchapters in lower case, and verses with Arabic numerals.) Because of this feature, the text is very often referred to as “the king [of *tantras*] in two chapters” (*dvikalparāja*). Some ancillary *tantras* and commentaries state that the two chapters were

extracted from a mythical *Ur-tantra* in 32 chapters. There is a chance that the *Hevajratantra* itself refers to some such concept (I.xi.12).

### I.i: On the *Vajra* Family

The text opens with a modified etiological passage: it does contain the customary opening formula (*evaṃ mayā śrutam* etc.), but here the lord is said to have been abiding in the womb of *vajra* women. This opening is inherited from the *Guhyasamājatantra*. Although the role of the petitioner is assumed mostly by the bodhisattva Vajragarbha (a role sometimes handed over to the consort of Hevajra and other goddesses), the first words are spoken by the lord himself. This is an exhortation to the retinue to hear about Hevajra, who is the essence of three beings (*sattva*): *vajrasattva*, *mahāsattva*, and *samayasattva*. Vajragarbha intervenes and asks for clarification regarding these three, which is given. He then asks about the name Hevajra itself. The answer is that *he* means great compassion, whereas *vajra* means wisdom; the name symbolizes the union of the two. A short overview of contents follows. The lord then teaches the philosophical background with which Hevajra/Heruka should be visualized. Vajragarbha then asks about the tubes (*nāḍī*) that pervade the body. These are taught to be 32 in number, among them three are the most important ones (*lalanā*, *rasanā*, and the central *avadhūti*). The names of the four wheels (*cakra*) are also given: three are named after the three bodies of the Buddha (*nirmāṇa*, *saṃbhoga*, *dharma*), the last is that of great bliss (*mahāsukha*). A further list of items in sets of four follows, with the implication that all these sets are somehow correlated. It is to be noted that the text displays a peculiar predilection for sets of four. The subchapter closes with a single verse on the yogic practice of “inner heat” (*caṇḍālī*; better known in its Tibetan rendering, *gtum mo*). This particular system of tubes and wheels, as well as the practice of *caṇḍālī*, are innovations of the text.

### I.ii: On Mantras

The second subchapter deals mostly with mantras, which are given openly (that is to say, not through encoding and decoding, although that process too is used later). The mantras given include that for food offering (*balī*), the seed syllables of the tathāgatas, the heart mantra of Hevajra, a spell to shake a city, the seed syllables of the *yoginīs*, the mantras of the two-armed, four-armed, and six-armed ectypes of Hevajra, the seed syllables for the empowerment

of body, speech, and mind, a protective spell to purify the ground for ritual purposes, spells for various aggressive rites, and other minor rites such as weather magic, martial magic, and chasing away wild animals.

### I.iii: On the Deity/Deities

This subchapter describes the deity Hevajra with some details for the procedure of visualization. He arises from the seed syllable *hūṃ*, which arises from a *vajra*, he is dark in color, and is surrounded by eight goddesses who worship him. Their names are Gaurī, Caurī, Vetālī/Vettālī, Ghasmarī, Pukkasī, Śavarī, Caṇḍālī, and Ḍombī. It is noteworthy that the latter four are named after various outcaste groups. There are only minor differences between this retinue and that of Heruka in the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālaśaṃvara*. The symbolism of the cremation ground, where the deity and its retinue reside, is prominent. The closing part gives the particulars for two ectypes, a four-armed and a six-armed Hevajra. The former holds a skull bowl filled with blood, a *vajra*, and embraces his consort, here called Vajravārāhī (who is otherwise the consort of Śaṃvara). The latter has three faces, holds a trident, a *vajra*, a bell, a chopping-flaying knife, and embraces his consort, who in this case is called Vajraśrīkhalā.

### I.iv: On Consecration by the Deities

The very short fourth subchapter describes the visualization of being consecrated by the deities (i.e. buddhas and goddesses) once the visualization of oneself as Hevajra is completed.

### I.v: On Reality

As the title suggests, here the subject matter is more doctrinal than practical. Some verses are metaphysical statements reminiscent of the Prajñāpāramitā literature, several verses teach details concerning the *yogin's* consort, but one also finds semantic analyses of technical terms and names, both tantric and non-tantric.

### I.vi: On the Observance

This subchapter describes the post-initiatory observance (*caryā*), in which the practitioner is to assume the physical appearance of the deity. He should first gain a certain amount of mastery over yogic meditation in a solitary place. Then he should acquire a young and beautiful consort, roam the land with her, interact freely with all castes, eat and drink

whatever is found; in short, he should free himself of all restrictive social inhibitions. It is hinted that during the time of the observance (the exact time span is not given, otherwise typically six months), the initiate is free of all ritual obligations except reverence to his *guru*.

### I.vii: On Secret Gestures

The seventh subchapter is for the most part dedicated to secret hand gestures (*chommā*) by which male and female initiates can recognize and communicate with each other. The appropriate places for such meetings (*melāpakasthāna*) are then listed, with the appropriate days for practice. Further doctrinal injunctions are given: the *yogin* is not to discriminate between right and wrong deeds, appropriate and inappropriate diet, correct and incorrect thought and speech. All movements and words are to be considered *mudrās* and mantras of the deity Heruka (i.e. Hevajra), for whose name a semantic analysis is given.

### I.viii: On the Circle of Yoginīs

This subchapter gives further details about visualization, especially about the retinue called the circle of *yoginīs* (*yoginīcakra*). This consists of the main consort, Nairātmyā in the middle, and 14 goddesses: Vajrā, another Gaurī, Vāriyoginī, and Vajraḍākinī in the inner circle in the intermediate directions, the octet already mentioned above in the outer circle, with Khecarī above and Bhūcarī below. Their iconographic details are given. About halfway through the subchapter the text announces that thus far the stage of generation (*utpattikrama*) has been taught, with teachings on the stage of the perfected/fully arisen (*utpannakrama*) to follow. This is described in terms of sexual yoga, where the practitioner experiences the series of four blisses (*ānanda*): bliss (*ānanda*), supreme bliss (*paramānanda*), the bliss of cessation (*viramānanda*), and innate bliss (*sahajānanda*). The order is given thus, but later on in the text the last two are given in reverse order. There were two schools of thought on this matter and quite a lot of exegesis has been created around this controversy (Isaacson & Sferra, 2014, 94–109). The subchapter closes with philosophical verses on meditation and its benefits.

### I.ix: On Purification

The ninth subchapter deals with the idea of *viśuddhi* (for an in-depth analysis of the term, see Sferra, 1999), broadly speaking a series of correlations

between the tantric world of deities and the realm of Mahāyāna/Abhidharma doctrinal concepts. For example, the four central goddesses with Nairātmyā are said to be the aggregates (*skandha*), a further set of four are paralleled with the gross elements beginning with earth, the 16 arms of Hevajra are taught to correspond to the 16 kinds of emptiness, and so on.

### I.x: On initiation

The penultimate subchapter deals mostly with matters related to initiation (*abhiṣeka*). A diagram of the deities (*maṇḍala*) is drawn with colored powders in a carefully purified place. A consort is presented to the officiant, who copulates with her and makes the disciple ingest the resulting sexual fluids. After some elaboration on the four blisses, further details of the diagram are given, such as the threads used to delineate the diagram, its ornamentation, the symbols used in lieu of the anthropomorphic representation of the deities, and so forth. The subchapter concludes with a somewhat obscure passage concerning the relationship between being embodied and innate bliss.

### I.xi

The last subchapter of the first *kalpa* is untitled; some exegetes call it that “On Gazes” (that the practitioner should adopt according to the ritual he wishes to perform), which is indeed the first topic addressed. In addition, for each of the kinds of gazes, phases of breath control and targets for practice, such as grass and trees, are taught. A subsequent passage describes a cannibalistic ritual performed to obtain the power of flying; another, the practice of the goddess Kurukullā for subjugation.

### II.i: On Oblation into Fire

The first subchapter of the second *kalpa* does give various details about the oblation ritual (*homa*) – the shape and size of the fire pit for example – but it opens with a question about the consecration (*pratiṣṭhā*) of images.

### II.ii: On Ascertaining Accomplishment

The main topic is the practitioner’s daily meditation: he should seek salvation by continuously cultivating identity with the deity or deities. After a short solitary practice he should obtain a suitable consort and continue with her. Various praises of the practice are given and it is stated that all can benefit from it, even the greatest sinners. The text reinforces the idea of gradual practice in two stages – that of

generation (*utpattikrama*) and that of the perfected (*utpannakrama*) – and explains the reason why it is constructed thus (Isaacson, 2001, 468–472).

### II.iii: On the Fundamentals of All *Tantras* and Secret Language

Here the *yoginīs* join Vajragarbha as addressees and petitioners. The lord teaches elucidations on the initial word *evaṃ*, the four moments of bliss and the blisses themselves, the four initiations, the *maṇḍala*, the vows binding the initiate, and further miscellaneous matters, some of which are reiterations. The last passage teaches the initiates' secret codewords (*sandhyābhāṣā*).

### II.iv: The Summary of the Entire *Tantra* and Sealing

Exceeding a century of verses, this is the longest subchapter of the text; it is correspondingly complex and often puzzling. The lord is asked to provide elucidations on topics only briefly mentioned in previous subchapters. He addresses the questions with due digressions. First, he proclaims songs in Apabhramsha, and then teaches various matters, such as elucidations about the communal feast, the seed syllables of the *yoginīs*, the nature of semen/resolve of enlightenment (*bodhicitta*), the sexual practices with one's consort, the bodies of a buddha, further songs, philosophical aphorisms on liberation, the food offering, and "sealing" (*mudraṇa*) – in essence, a kind of *viśuddhi*.

### II.v: The Glory of Hevajra

Requested by Nairātmyā, Hevajra teaches the practice of the sixteen-armed, eight-faced quadrupede Heruka and his retinue. This is the subchapter giving most of the details related to visualization, daily practice, and incidental rituals. Details on the initiation rite are also taught; this passage includes a direct reference to the emblematic *yogatantra*, the *Tattvasaṃgraha*.

### II.vi: On the Scroll Painting

After making love to his consort, Hevajra first teaches the symbolism of the five bone ornaments (*mudrā*) and only then details related to how a scroll painting (*paṭa*) depicting the deities should be prepared. The text does not go into technicalities; it rather focuses on the ceremonial setting up of the actual act of painting.

### II.vii: On the Feast

The title again describes only about half of the subject matter covered. The subchapter opens with details related to preparing and handling a book containing the *Hevajratantra*: it should be written on birch bark 12 fingerwidths long with human blood as ink and a stylus made of human bone. It, just as the painting, should not be seen by non-initiates and it should be hidden on one's body when traveling. The second part describes a communal feast (*gaṇamaṇḍala*), which is to take place in a secluded area such as a cremation ground. Under the supervision of a *guru*, the initiates should sit on tiger hides, eat, and share liquor from a skull bowl.

### II.viii: On Those to Be Trained

The subchapter first teaches some physical and behavioral characteristics that an ideal consort, who has already been described as young and beautiful, should possess. The subsequent passage gives a prayer (*praṇidhāna*) in which the *yogin* expresses his hope to be continually reborn as a Hevajra initiate. The final few verses describe an inclusivistic propedeutic model to convert and train beings. First, they should be instructed in standard Buddhist morality; then, they should be taught Vaibhāṣika doctrines, then Sautrāntika ones, then Yogācāra, and finally Madhyamaka; after this, esoteric Buddhism (Mantranaya) in general, which culminates with the Hevajra. (For this important verse and some exegesis on it, see Isaacson, 2007, 291–292.)

### II.ix: On Decoding Mantras

The first topic to be addressed in this subchapter is a rite to magically kill enemies of Buddhism. The text continues with further *viśuddhis* and ends with the system of decoding mantras (*mantroddhāra*).

### II.x: On Recitation

The shortest subchapter of the text deals with the various materials to be used for making the beads of the rosary (again customized for various rituals), as well as the corresponding diet.

### II.xi: On That Which Has the Innate As Its Purpose

The subchapter opens with teaching the bodily signs of affinity with deity clans and closes with instructions on how to worship the physical consort (here *mahāmudrā*) sexually.

## II.xii

The final subchapter is not named separately. It is very short and teaches verses that are to be used in sexual initiation.

## Commentaries on the *Hevajatantra*

At present we have access in some form to at least 16 Indian commentaries. Among those available in the original, a pithy but most sophisticated example is Ratnākaraśānti's *Muktāvālī* (ed. Tripathi & Negi, 2001; a project to reedit the text has been announced by Isaacson), which "explicitly attempts to show that tantric practice of the kind taught in the *Hevajatantra* does not conflict with, but rather is in perfect accord with, the basic teachings of (non-tantric) Buddhism" (Isaacson, 2002, 151[80]). The author was active in the first half of the 11th century (Isaacson, 2001, 457).

Also available in the original is the *Yogaratnamālā* of (a) Kāṇha/Kṛṣṇa (or \*Samayavajra, or Śāntibhadra), who may have been a disciple of Ratnākaraśānti (Isaacson, 2001, 458) rather than a commentator from as early as the 9th century (tentatively dated so in Snellgrove, 1959, 13–14; accepted without hesitation in Farrow & Menon, 1992, viii), now available in two editions (Snellgrove, 1959; Tripathi & Negi, 2006) and an English translation (Farrow & Menon, 1992).

Vajragarbha's *Ṣaṭśahasrikā Hevajraṇḍārthaṭīkā* is a commentary from the viewpoint of the Kālacakra doctrine (ed. Shendge, 2004; Sferra has announced a new complete edition, some chapters of which have already appeared accompanied by translations: the first in Sferra 2009a; the tenth in Sferra 2009b).

There are at least two commentaries available in Sanskrit, which have not been translated into Tibetan. Kamalanātha/Maṅjuśrī's *Ratnāvālī* (KLK 231), although the work of an obscure author, can be shown to have been rather influential on the famous Abhayākara Gupta. Kelikulīśa's *Trivajraratnāvalīmālikā pañjikā* (a photographic copy is available at the NSUG Xc 14/36; reported to have survived, KCDS, 146) is an attempt to blend the *Guhyasamājatantra* doctrine and practice as taught in the Ārya school of exegesis with that of the *Hevajatantra* (Isaacson, 2009, 91). Not much else is known about this author; since the manuscript is dated to the 19th regnal year of (a) Madanapāla, he must predate the mid-12th century.

The *Vajrapadasārasaṃgraha* of Yaśobhadra is suspected to be extant in Sanskrit, but for the time

being only the Tibetan translation is available (D 1186/P 2316).

A further ten commentaries are available only in Tibetan (D 1181–1182, 1184–1185, 1187–1188, 1190–1193/P 2311–2312, 2314–2315, 2317–2318, 2320–2323), including three that were possibly written in the 10th century (those of Bhavabhaṭṭa, Durjayacandra, and Padmāṅkuravajra).

## Satellite Texts

In spite of there having been several initiation manuals for this system, some of which now survive only in Tibetan, the only such work known to be extant in Sanskrit is the anonymous and incomplete *Hevajrasekaprakriyā* (ed. and French trans. Finot, 1934, 19–48; ed. and notes Isaacson & Sanderson, unpublished). The only such work partially translated into English, that of a \*Prajñāśrī (Snellgrove, 1987, 254–260), is very likely a canonized Tibetan composition (Isaacson 2010, 273). Ratnākaraśānti's *Hevajrābhyudayamaṅḍalopāyikā* does not survive, but the author himself refers to it (Isaacson, 2002, 152[79]).

Among the practical manuals surviving in Sanskrit (and also perhaps among all such works), the most influential was Saroruhavajra's *Hevajrasādhanopāyikā/Hevajrasādhanopayikā* (anonymous ed., 2003, badly in need of revision; D 1218/P 2347). A commentary on this text also survives, Jālandharipāda/Vajranātha/Suratavajra's *Vajrapradīpā* (the best ms. so far is NSUG Xc 14/38; D 1237/P 2366), which is yet another attempt to harmonize the meditation system proposed by Ārya exegesis and Hevajra practice. Continuing this tradition is Rāhulagupta's *Pañcakramānuttarahevajraprakāśa* (bar an apograph, the only known manuscript is dated 1272 CE, microfilmed by the Institute for the Advanced Study of World Religions, MBB-I-39, and the NGMPP, X 1504/1, this witness also contains an appendix on external worship; only partially matching translation D 1238/P 2367).

Very carefully crafted practical manuals are Ratnākaraśānti's *Bhramahara* on the generation stage (*utpattikrama*; ed. Isaacson, 2002; annotations in Isaacson, 2007) and the same author's *Hevajrasahajasadyoga* on the stage of the perfected (*utpannakrama*; ed. Isaacson, 2001); this latter work also has a commentary, which survives only in Tibetan (Isaacson, 2001, 459).

A veritable treasure trove of practical manuals (but also hymns and other miscellanea) is an

anthology preserved in a single, 14th-century manuscript from Nepal: the 272 folios preserve 45 works (including an exception, the *Vajrajāloḍayā* by Ānandagarbha, which is a practical manual based on the *Sarvabuddhasamāyogaḍākinījālaśaṃvara*), a large proportion of which has not been transmitted to Tibet. (For a description and list of contents, see Isaacson, 2010.)

Among further surviving materials deserving close attention are Ḍombīheruka's *Sahajasiddhī* (Shendge, 1967), his *Amṛtaprabhā* (more likely a record by a student, not a direct work; ed. Bhattacharya, 1928, 443–449; D 1306/P 2436), and [an] Āryadeva's *Pratipattisāraśataka* (about half of the original survives in NAK 1–1679 *bauddhastotra* 14; D 2334/P 4695; perhaps complete in ms. reported in KCDS, 82).

### Ancillary Tantras and Their Exegesis

Perhaps the earliest and certainly the most influential ancillary scripture inspired by the *Hevajratantra* is the *Ḍākinīvajrapañjara*. A Sanskrit manuscript of this work is reported to exist in China (KCDS, 140), but for now we have access only to the Tibetan translation (D 419/P 11). A short commentary, the anonymous *Ḍākinīvajrapañjaratippati* (KLK 230) is available only in Sanskrit, whereas the original of Mahāmatideva's *Tattvasīdā* survives in part (scattered: folio 1 in KLK 134; folios 2–15 in NAK 5–20; last folio in NAK 5–23), and in full in Tibetan (D 1196/P 2326). Two further commentaries exist only in Tibetan translation (D 1194–1195/P 2324–2325). This scripture already states that there was an extensive *Ur-tantra* in 500,000 (units or verses) in 32 *kalpas*, to which the commentator Vajragarbha, keeping in line with a feature known to be that of Kālacakra exegetes, claimed to have access.

Another very important ancillary scripture, the *Mahāmudrātilaka*, survives in full in a *codex unicus* (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Hs.or. 8711, dated 1823/1824 CE); the Tibetan translation (D 420/P 12) is that of a different recension. This text also mentions the same mythical source in 500,000 (units or verses). The main deity is similar to the 16-armed Hevajra, but with 16 faces, some different implements and a distinctive retinue of 32 goddesses. A commentary on the entire text is known only from Tibetan, that of \*Gambhīravajra (D 1200/P 2330), a work that is very rich in references to the teachings of various *siddhas*, who are often identified by the region they

inhabited (Kashmir, Jalandhar, Oddiyana, Bengal, Assam are mentioned). A commentary on the opening lines and various selected topics is by the Kashmiri \*Prajñāśrīgupta (D 1201/P 2331), a disciple of his famous compatriot Ratnavajra, who states that he wrote to honor the request of a Tibetan, Rinchen Rgyal mtshan. However, careless editing suggests that the text originally consisted of draft notes for himself and his disciples. Both were involved in several Tibetan translations.

A further, perhaps less significant ancillary scripture is the \**Jñānagarbha* (D 421/P 13) in four chapters, the opening of which explicitly refers to the *Mahāmudrātilaka*. Oddly, the *Mahāmudrātilaka* also refers to the \**Jñānagarbha*; however, the content referred to is not to be found in the version available to us, and therefore we must suspect that this was a different text. The text as we have it deals for the most part with topics related to initiation.

A long, completely unstudied but perhaps important, ancillary scripture is the \**Jñānatilaka* (D 422/P 14), on which two commentaries are available in Tibetan (D 1202–1203/P 2332–2333).

This text, in turn, is referred to yet another, short ancillary *tantra*, the \**Tattvapradīpa* (D 423/P 15), which also contains a prophecy about the king Indrabhūti, a seminal mythical figure who came to stand at the top of several initiation lineages. This text also attracted the attention of exegetes, whose works are also available only in Tibetan: the \**Ratnamālā* of \*Mahāsukhavajra (D 1205/P 2335) is a commentary to the entire text, whereas \*Prajñāśrīgupta's \**Ratnamañjarī* (D 1217/P 2346) elaborates only on the opening line.

The *Samputodbhava* (on the constitution of which, see Szántó, 2013) is also mentioned by the Tibetan tradition as an ancillary scripture, but this is perhaps merely on the account of the large number of verses lifted over from the *Hevajratantra* and their compounding with passages from other texts.

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