

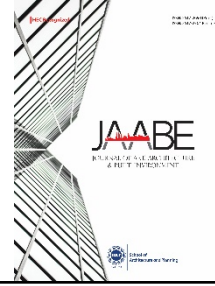
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Reviving the Forgotten, Diminishing Glory of Sikh Heritage: A Case Study of Haveli Ranjit Singh Gujranwala, Pakistan

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Abstract

Heritage is the legacy of the past, a memoir of history, pride, and inspiration cherished by one generation and passed to the next generations. It elucidates the glory and value, architectural significance, continuity, and identity; which define who we are. Despite the importance of heritage, it's never guaranteed to survive and be passed on to the next generations at its best. Many of the glories of past got buried under the layers of time, forgotten and abandoned. These heritage structures are severely dilapidated with structural distress and vandalized due to encroachments. This research paper emphasizes the elapsed and neglected heritage building of the Sikh clan; the founders of the city, located in Gujranwala, to document the significance of the structure, its causes of decay and neglect, and the importance of its conservation and revival. To give it life to be explored and appreciated by the public. The qualitative research methodology was adopted for this paper to document the heritage structure, using both primary and secondary resources including photographic surveys, interviews, detailed site inspection, and literature review. The objective of the paper is to document this haveli, explore causes of neglect and deterioration and how to address it, in the later stage, how to enhance its value to open it for both national and international tourism.

Keywords: haveli, Ranjit Singh, Sikh heritage, decay, deterioration, Gujranwala, tourism.

Introduction

Gujranwala located in the northeast of Punjab got prominence under Sikh rule in the later part of 18th century. The city was founded and established by Charat Singh and Mahan Singh, heads of Sikh clan (Naz & Zaidi, [2013](#)). Charat Singh, grandfather of Maharaja Ranjit Singh established his stronghold in 1763, Ranjit Singh himself was born in Gujranwala, founder of Sikh rule in Punjab (Chaudhry, [2000](#)) became powerful of all Sikh rulers

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(Chattha, [2011](#)). The city holds significant architectural heritage of Sikh legacy, which includes haveli of Charat Singh (recently demolished) Samadhi of Mahan Singh, Samadhi of Charat Singh, The Lion Garden, Haveli of Hari Singh, Sikh Gurdwara, and most imperatively birthplace of Ranjit Singh known as haveli Ranjit Singh.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was the first Indian in a millennium to turn the tide of invasion back into the homelands of the traditional conquerors of India, the Pashtuns (Afghans), and he thus became known as the Lion of the Punjab. At their height, his domains extended from the Khyber Pass in the northwest to the Sutlej River in the east and from the Kashmir region at the northern limit of the Indian subcontinent southward to the Thar (Great Indian) Desert (Ali, [2017](#)). He is remembered as a great Punjab ruler, born in a haveli located in the walled city of Gujranwala. The foundation of the existing old city of Gujranwala was laid by Charat Singh in 1765. A wall surrounding the city was built under his direction, the walled city had eleven gates originally. Among these eleven gates only two had survived.

Sikh art and architecture is a blend of Mughal and Rajput style of design and architecture (Singh, [2020](#)). The Haveli of Ranjit Singh is one of the significant examples of Sikh architecture in the city of Gujranwala, Punjab, encompasses architectural, historical, heritage and political value for being associated with one of great native ruler of Punjab and having significant architecture features & elements. It also reflected the affluence and eminence of the Mahan Singh's authority and position being the ruler of Gujranwala. It was an example of earliest Sikh architecture, though less ostentatious than many later examples of Sikh monumental buildings including haveli of Nau Nihal Singh in Lahore, Omar Hayat Mahal in Chiniot, and many other examples but still a prestigious monument of heritage value. Conservation of Sikh heritage monuments can potentially attract religious tourism in Pakistan (Khilat, [2022](#)).

Literature Review

Ranjit Singh was born on 13 November 1780 in Gujranwala (Ashraf, [2021](#)). He was born into a Sikh Jatt family who were predominantly the warriors in Sikh history. He was admired for his tolerance, and respect towards Muslim religious practices, festivals, and various marvelous constructions. Ranjit Singh revived Sikh traditions with the concept of togetherness and led the great Sikh army also reflected in the constructions during his rule

(Crafts of Gujranwala, [2017](#)). Sikh architecture flourished during the regime of Ranjit Singh, mainly influenced by the Mughal and Safavid architecture (Elgemaiey, [2021](#)), it also reflected Hindu style of art and design (Ahmed, [2017](#)).

The Haveli of Ranjit Singh

Haveli of Ranjit Singh is almost 200 years old residential complex that was not only used for residential purposes but also entailed social, political, and religious significance. The Haveli has rich and captivating architecture and art, the architectural style of Haveli is a fusion of Sikh, Mughal, and Hindu architecture. The Haveli is remarkable for its fascinating intricate brickwork, cusped arches, pairs of fluted columns, and shallow niches. The internal and external surfaces have been beautifully and symmetrically divided into panels with the use of spanning columns, multifold arches, cornices, and rhythmic patterns of shallow niches. The harmonious combination of architectural elements has created eye captivating image of the haveli (Singh, [2016](#)).

Location

The Haveli of Maharaja Ranjit Singh is located in fish market, near Shairanwala Bagh (a garden where Ranjit Singh kept his lions), the walled city of Gujranwala. Haveli is connected to the Grand Trunk road accessible through a narrow road, encroached by different shops and stalls. (Figure 1)

Figure 1

The Location of Haveli



Note. (a) Gujranwala map, source: survey of Pakistan (1990), (b) Map of Gujranwala, source: Rahman, A. (1997), (c) Location of haveli, source: author

The front area of haveli is occupied by shops which has originally empty ground (kucha of haveli, one of significant features of Sikh havelis). The façade of haveli is partially hidden by shop fronts and hawker stalls, behind this, a rusty door is situated which leads to the haveli building. (Figure 2,3,4,5).

Figure 2

The Front Space of Haveli Converted into Shops



Figure 3

The Kucha of Haveli Encroached by The Venders



Figure 4

Arial View of the Kucha Occupied by Temporary -Structures




Figure 5

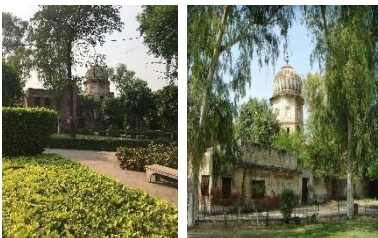

Encroachments Hiding the Façade of Haveli



Table 1

Significant Heritage Buildings Located within Proximity of Haveli Ranjit Singh

Heritage Buildings	Description	Illustration
Shairanwala Bagh	Located on grand trunk road, constructed by Mahan Singh along with the Baradari situated in the garden.	

Heritage Buildings	Description	Illustration
Samadhi of Mahan Singh	Located adjacent to Shera Wala Bagh. Building of same time period.	
Eimenabadi Gate	It was located to the south of Shera Wala Bagh, have been demolished. Lohari and Sialkoti gates are gates of same era.	 <p data-bbox="790 743 1119 777">Lahorigate Sialkoti gate</p>

Surrounding Heritage Condition

One of the walled city's gate leads to the haveli through a wider road of the inner city almost 15' wide, accessible by vehicles. There were significant heritage buildings, situated on the road; Shairanwala Bagh, Babraywala Mandir, and a few remaining heritage buildings of the same era. Most of the heritage buildings were being demolished and reconstructed, the area is still passing through the same phase of reconstruction and repair which lost the original identity of the area. Shairanwala Bagh is the most significant heritage of all, it has passed through different phases of reconstruction, besides which is Mahan Singh's Samadhi.

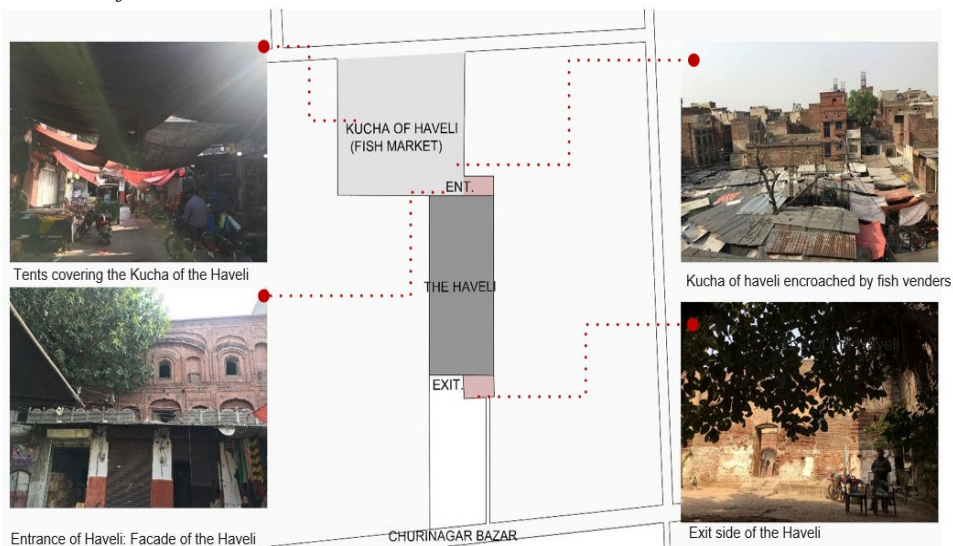
Access to Haveli

The Haveli is accessed through narrow streets, barely known by any locals. The Kucha of haveli or square, an integral part of most Sikh havelis had been encroached on by fish vendors and covered with tent structures and metaled sheets, on the façade of haveli shops had been built. The facade of haveli behind encroachments was hard to explore. At the entrance of the building, there was an open drain and a filthy smell of garbage and fish which repelled the tourists.

Figure 6
Hierarchy Map of Haveli's Route



Figure 7
Context of the Haveli



A symbol of the glorious past of Sikhs has been totally forgotten by the locals and authorities. Locals are unaware of its existence and authorities left it in ruins. The haveli was not only bearing worse wear and tear but also full of debris and garbage, with no cleanliness or regular maintenance found.

The ground floor area beneath the face, which was a porch was converted to shops in around 2012-2013. This construction led to the destruction of the entryway staircase located in front. (Qureshi, [2016](#))

Research Methodology

Qualitative research method employed to mitigate the research problem. The study focused on two types of approaches considering the theoretical part, based on the review of literature including books, scholarly articles, thesis reports and newspapers. Field research was done through reconnaissance surveys and observation at site. A number of visits were conducted for documentation and examination of the building, which helped further the analysis of the building.

Analysis and Discussion

Spatial Organization of Haveli

It is a single-story structure, elevated eight feet above the ground on a platform, (there were tunnels under the haveli; reported by the locals). The Haveli is accessed through narrow staircases, located on both sides of elevated platform. These staircases led to the main entrance of the haveli where main front hall of the building opens. The haveli has a rectangular plan with a courtyard in the center surrounded by verandahs like other traditional havelis of the subcontinent.

The Haveli has a long rectangular plan with the northeast orientation and the design seems to be a consideration of the prevailing wind direction of Gujranwala's urban fabric. In the late 18th century, it was surrounded by green areas and open areas but is now in a very busy environment surrounded by illegally built conquerors.

The main facade of the haveli faced south and is constructed with brick and plaster and inset with wood. Like buildings from the Mughal era, the surface is arranged as a symmetrical series of rectangular panels, separated from each other with ornamented and decorated pilasters spanned with multifold arches. On the upper ground floor, shallow niches were designed

below all of the arches. The large bay over the main entrance includes the profile of several smoothly curving bangala-style roofs (Ali, [2017](#)).

The first room in the building is also larger, with a double reception room with full width. Today it is poorly integrated and empty, it is easy to imagine this area by the authority of Mahan Singh, luxurious furniture, colorful wall paintings and smooth fire. (Ranjit Singh Birthplace, [n.d.](#))

Figure 8

Upper Ground Floor Plan

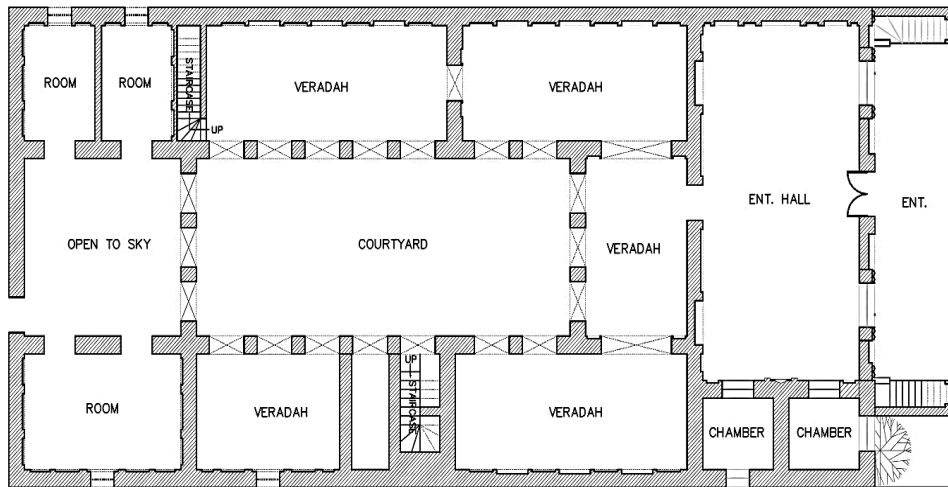


Figure 9

First Floor Plan

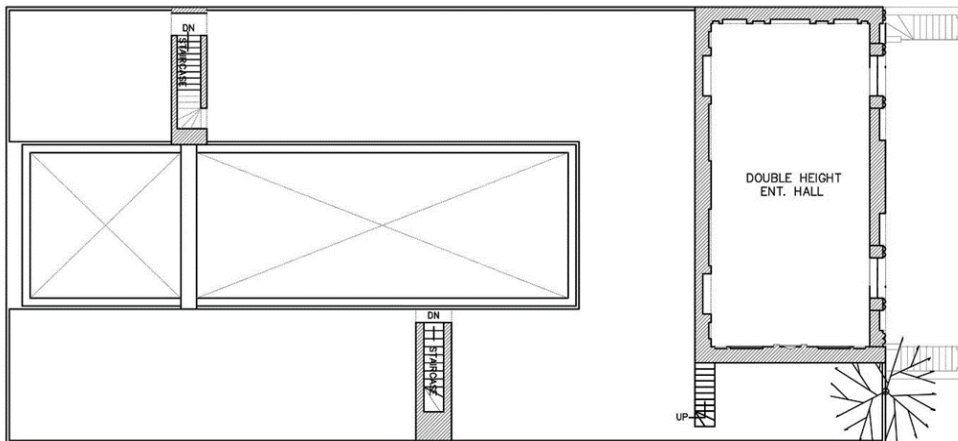


Figure 10
Façade of Haveli



Note. Source: (Krushnapaksha, [2013](#))

Figure 11
Encroachments Covering the Façade of Haveli



Figure 12
The Central Courtyard Surrounded by Verandas



Figure 13

Intricate Detail Work of Arches and Columns



Figure 14

The Inner/Private Courtyard Leading to Different Rooms



Figure15

Niches and Rich Masonry Work

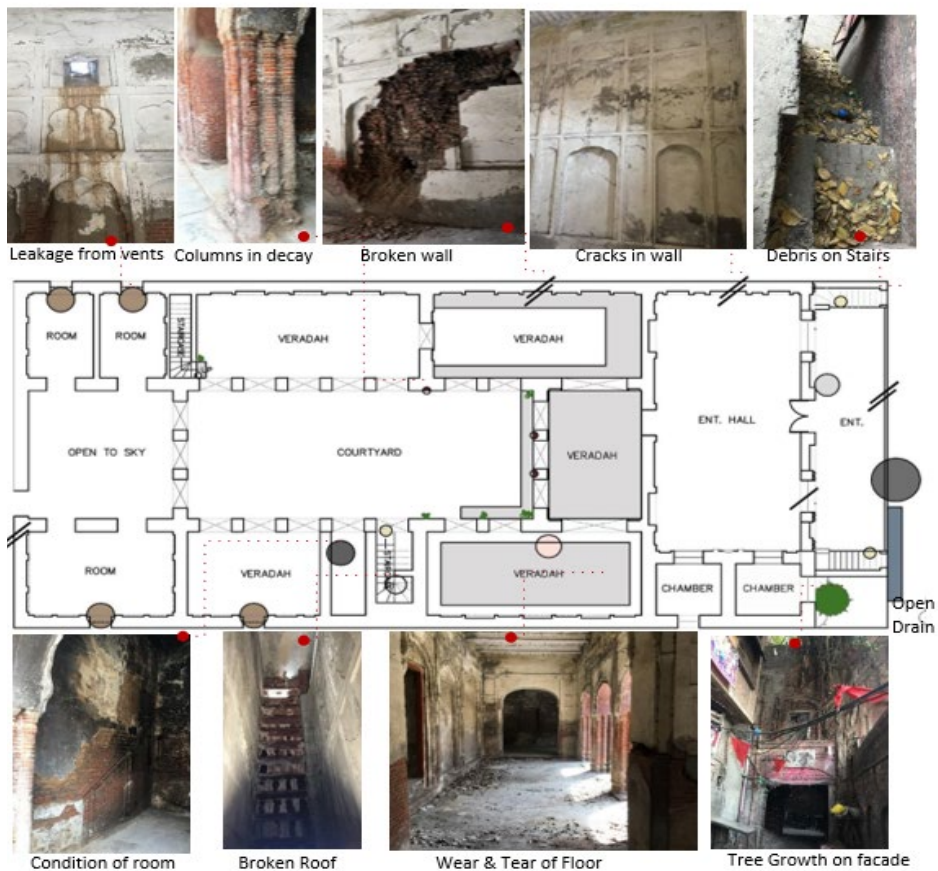


Current Condition of Haveli

The condition of Haveli is dejected and has deteriorated severely where a portion of the roof collapsed due to continuous neglect. Most of the structure has lost its originality and is buried under layers of inappropriate conservation. Deterioration not only in terms of structure can be seen but also in terms of its caretaking; it was very filthy as never cleaned or maintained; an abandoned structure utilized by drug edicts for usage. The building has been facing worse wear and tear and neglect. Local authorities have planned to conserve it considering its historical significance (District Gujranwala, [2023](#)).

Figure 16

Existing Condition of the Haveli



All types of decay could be seen in haveli and an exemplary inappropriate conservation can be witnessed. All elements of haveli building were deteriorating; floor is settled down and broken, and ceiling have lost its paint. The roof has been repaired in the near past. Instead of an old wooden roof as it must have been in its original condition, pre-cast concrete slabs have been installed for restoration. (Figure 16)

Figure 17

Decay Due to The Growth of The Vegetation in Various Parts of The Haveli



The walls and floor have been damaged in many places. The roof of the staircase had been ruined. There was leakage of water through open air vents in rooms, as a result, the walls have been exposed to water during rains. Vegetation has been grown on floors, walls and roof at many places, some of these are small plants; which were easily removable. But there is a huge tree grown on the front wall that has reached to the top of the building having deep down roots that are vulnerable to the building structure. On the whole, all the building elements have been in wear and tear condition. The building's originality and character have been buried under inappropriate conservation through ages. (Figure 17)

The exterior and interior of masonry walls have been cemented many times and further coated with local low-cost whitewash. Hence there were no traces of any decorative work found in the interiors.

Causes of Decay

Major causes of decay are:

- The neglect by the authorities and public.
- Inappropriate conservation.
- Natural forces.
- Lack of regular cleanliness and maintenance.

These major causes lead to other causes. The haveli was severely deteriorated by all means. All the elements of the haveli are under decay. Floors were smashed, walls were cracked, columns were worn & torn, and holes were in the ceiling.

There is vegetation growing all over the haveli where an apparent large rubber plant has grown, reaching the top roof of the building. Which was never removed which let it to turn into a huge tree.

While inappropriate conservation included cementing of walls and brick structure, finished with local low-cost paints. Roofs replaced or reconstructed with precast R.C.C. slabs. Walls had been whitewashed which had been peeling off.

Layers of Inappropriate Conservation

The whole structure, including walls, roof, floor, and doors have been passed through different phases of conservation, one element doesn't match with the other.

Floors have been finished roughly with cement pilaster, somewhere terrazzo finishes, somewhere brick finishes, and somewhere totally broken in the form of debris. (Figure 18)

Figure18

Floor Deterioration at Different Parts in the Haveli



The ceiling has been reconstructed at many places differently; mostly precast R.C.C slabs have been used for reconstruction and repairs. The ceiling differs from space to space. The oldest ceiling found in Haveli was of the staircase which was constructed in timber and brick rest all are precast R.C.C slabs. The most recently added roof reconstruction was done in a verandah. (Figure 19)

Figure 19

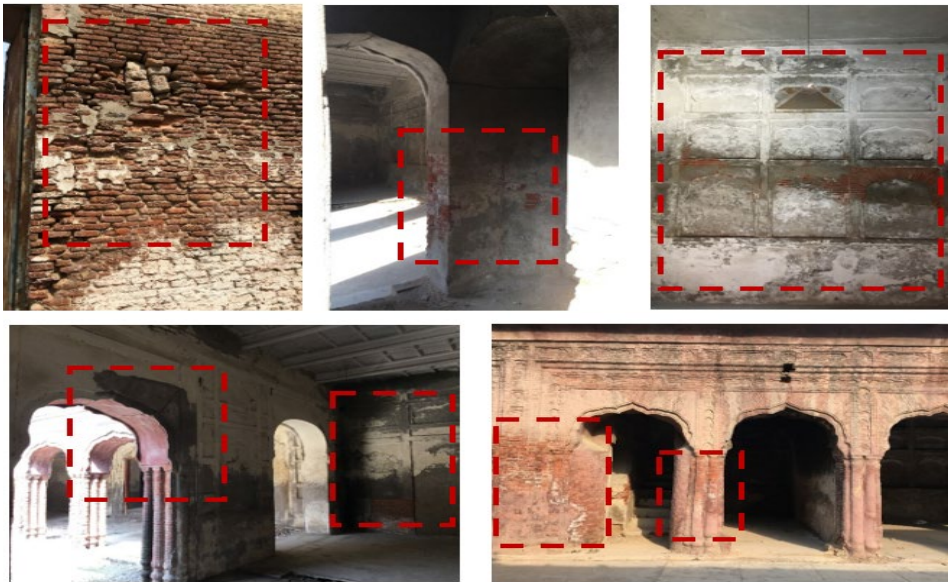
Ceiling Condition of Different Areas



A similar trend of reconstruction was found for wall repairs. The exterior and interior walls have been finished with cement plaster. Ruined walls were reconstructed with modern colonial bricks instead of original size bricks. (Figure 20)

Figure 20

Surface Deterioration on Exterior and Interior Walls



The doors, windows, and other elements of haveli were also dilapidated condition. The windows on the facade are broken and the rooms are without doors. Latterly added elements to the haveli i.e., the jali work, roof slabs, and modern colonial-sized brick, for repair and reconstruction didn't harmonize with the architecture and originality of the haveli. (Figure 21)

Figure 21

Inappropriate Repair Work



Conclusion and Recommendations

The inclusive research of the heritage structure inferred that in spite of facing years of wear and tear it still possesses a prodigious potential for having cultural, emotional, religious, architectural, and archeological value and significance. It is the birthplace of Sikh's most influential leader; Ranjit Singh comprises the history of the city and has rich architectural value due to its form and intricate architectural elements. The proximity of Haveli also consists of other heritage monuments, especially the Sikh heritage monument as the historic city was built by the Sikh clan. This fact refers that the area should be opened for tourism.

The haveli and areas surrounding both sides of the grand trunk have many heritage and architectural significant monuments. The conservation of these monuments and publicity can boost not only national but also international tourism. A huge number of Sikhs tourists visit Lahore and now after the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor project the number of visitors has increased. The geographical location of Gujranwala; situated on the route of Lahore to Sialkot recommend that it can be another tourist point.

For this purpose, the route should be cleared leading to the haveli by removing the encroachments and making it accessible, as well as the building needing immediate repairs and conservation. The first stage or the rapid action plan, requires regular cleanliness and maintenance to avoid debris and vegetation; grown on walls, floors, and roof should be removed. In the long run plan, all the building elements should be conserved and repaired to the original. In the second stage, it should be utilized to give life back to the structure, for this purpose it could be converted to a museum displaying the history of the city and its developments. It could be preserved as a residence of Maharaja Ranjit Singh by decorating it with artifacts of his belongings or replicas. Encroachments should be removed from the Kucha of the haveli and it could be converted to open and green space with food kiosks for visitors.

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