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Madras University Historical Series IV

HINDU ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS

HINDU ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS

BY

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EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ait. Br.	=	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>
Ar. Śās.	=	<i>Arthaśāstra of Kauṣalya</i>
A.V.	=	<i>Atharva Veda Samhita</i>
Alt. leben.	=	<i>Altindische Leben</i>
Br. sūtra	=	<i>Bārhaspatya sūtras</i>
C.H.I.	=	<i>Cambridge History of India</i>
Cal. Orient.		
Series.	=	<i>Calcutta Oriental Series</i>
Ep. Ind.	=	<i>Epigraphia Indica</i>
Ep. Rep.	=	<i>Epigraphist Report</i>
F.G.I.	=	<i>Fleet Gupta Inscriptions</i>
H.O.S.	=	<i>Harvard Oriental Series</i>
I.H.Q.	=	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i>
In. Ant.	=	<i>Indian Antiquary</i>
J.A.O.S.	=	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
J.B.O.R.S.	=	<i>Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society</i>
J.R.A.S.	=	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
Kāma.	=	<i>Kāmandakanṭī</i>
Kauś. Br.	=	<i>Kauṣitaki Brāhmaṇa</i>
Mbh.	=	<i>Mahabharata</i>
P.T.S.	=	<i>Pali Text Society</i>
Pañch. Br.	=	<i>Pañchaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa</i>
R.N.R.	=	<i>Rajantīratnakara</i>
Raghu.	=	<i>Raghuvamśa</i>
R.V.	=	<i>Rig Veda Samhita</i>
S.B.E.	=	<i>Sacred Books of the East, Oxford</i>
S.B.H.	=	<i>Sacred Books of the Hindus, Allahabad</i>
S.I.I.	=	<i>South Indian Inscriptions</i>
S.T.R.	=	<i>Śivalattva Ratnakara</i>
Sukra.	=	<i>Sukrantīśara</i>
Tait. Br.	=	<i>Taittariya Brāhmaṇa</i>
V.I.	=	<i>Vedic Index</i>
Yāj.	=	<i>Yājñavalkya-smṛti</i>
Z.D.M.G.	=	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morganlandischen Gesellschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

THE pages following attempt to present a picture of the administrative institutions of the Hindus, based primarily on the political portions of the Dharmaśāstras, and Arthaśāstra treatises. It is the work of V. R. Ramachandra Dikshitar, M.A., as a research student at the University during the years 1923-27. He attempts by a frankly synthetic method, to collect together such information as could be got on the political ideas and the principles underlying the institutions of the Hindus for carrying on administration. A subject such as this can hardly be regarded as fully worked up until the ideals of government obtaining at the time when they happen to be set down in writing, whether as general principles in the Dharmaśāstras or specific instructions in the Arthaśāstras, are clearly and fully exhibited in the first instance. When this is done, the result has to be compared and checked by such information as could be gleaned from even didactic works such as the portions of the *Mahābhārata* bearing upon Rāja Dharma for instance, and other chapters scattered through the work. This has again to be compared with such details as could be got from works of a similar character. These two items may be regarded as constituting the literary side of the work.

How far these ideas of literary men actually found vogue has next to be examined, and it can be done only by a study of the inscriptions ranging from the time of Asoka to quite modern times. The details that can be got in this body of records may not give us a

general conspectus of Hindu political institutions as a whole. But such hints as we get may enable us, with the aid of the literary sources, to reconstruct to a great extent the institutions as they existed. This would prove a valuable source of confirmation of what we may be really able to reconstruct from the literary sources alone. This can again be checked and verified wherever possible, from accounts that we get of the institutions that prevailed at any particular time from foreigners that left accounts of them either by design, or when they made casual remarks regarding them, in the course of their writing on other themes. It is when all this work is done exhaustively that we can at all hope to obtain a picture, complete in all its details, of the administrative institutions of India under the Hindus.

What follows is an attempt at reconstructing Hindu administrative institutions primarily from the first of these four items, letting in information wherever available from the other sources to fill in where necessary and complete the account of the institutions as given in the Kauṭilya Text Book. This itself is adequate work for the time that the research student had for doing this. It may be that he is enabled to complete the work in the future; but, as it is, the work is an attempt at doing this and no more. The discovery of the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya, now called Kauṭalya, more popularly called Chāṇakya, may be regarded, in some respects at any rate, epoch making. The publication in 1909 of the text by Dr. R. Shama Sastri and a partial translation in the pages of the *Indian Antiquary* immediately set scholars at work; and since then many books have been written on the subject and one may fairly expect many more perhaps before the subject is exhausted. All of them have the general object of expounding the *Arthaśāstra*

in an attempt to present a complete picture of the administrative institutions of Hindu India. Each one of these works has its own particular merit, and perhaps even its own particular contribution. But what may perhaps be claimed for the following pages is an attempt to present a faithful picture of the administrative institutions as depicted in the *Arthaśāstra* from a conservative point of view, without attempting to expound these with a view to establishing any particular thesis as to the character of the government of the time. A work of this kind naturally is not precisely chronological in its character. Illustrations and illuminating comments are drawn without detriment from works of different times and perhaps even of places at great distances. The idea merely is to exhibit what the particular institutions were by means of which the functions of government were actually carried out. Unless we gain a correct idea of the actual character of the institutions as they prevailed from time to time as described in different treatises, or sources that may not really be treatises, it will be difficult to trace anything like a development of these institutions. Where that is not possible, the next best effort ought to be to get as complete a picture of these institutions as we can, and that is what is attempted to be done here, and, to that extent, it may lay itself open to the objection that it is not rigorously chronological; but in our present state of knowledge of the subject, that is as yet hardly possible.

The question would arise from this limitation whether the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya is a unified work of a single author or of a single age, and whether it actually portrays the institutions of the time. The matter has been discussed with energy, very nearly a score of years now, and anything like an unchallenged conclusion can hardly

be said to have been reached so far. It seems, however, to be generally accepted that it is the work either of an individual Kauṭilya, or of a school that adopted his teaching. The age of the work has again been discussed and acute differences of opinion exist as yet. There are those that would regard it as the work of the individual minister of the emperor Chandragupta Maurya; there are others equally earnest for enforcing the conclusion that it is a work compiled somewhere about A.D. 300, when somebody felt the need for incorporating the Kauṭilyian traditions in a text-book. As far as can be judged from the discussion on the work and on a study of the work itself, the conclusion of Prof. Meyer seems nearer correct, and, for a conservative position, the following sentences of Monahan seem sound: 'There is, however, sufficient evidence of a persistent tradition in India ascribing to Chandragupta's minister the authorship of the *Arthaśāstra* in question and the very existence of such a tradition seems to support a presumption that, whether the whole treatise or any part of it be the work of Chāṇakya or not, it deals with social conditions and institutions which prevailed in the Maurya Period, and especially in the region nearest to the Mauryan dominions, namely, Bihar and Bengal. This does not mean that we should expect to find in the administration depicted, agreement in all details with that which may have been observed by Megasthenes at Pāṭaliputra, when the Magadha State had grown into an Empire.'

We may perhaps go a little further. There is nothing *prima facie* in its having been the actual teaching of an individual such as the minister of Chandragupta had been. One objection that we have found stated in regard to this particular position is that the work seems to be the work of a pandit, and not of a practical statesman

such as the chancellor of the Mauryan Empire must have been. This reminds us of the impatience that Bismark often exhibited against the professorial members of the Reichstag soon after the formation of the German Empire that they were ponderous doctrinaires whose discussions or advice could hardly avail much for carrying on practical administration. Whatever justification Bismark may have had, it is a patent fact that, under the Hindu administration in India from the days of Kauṭilya to Govinda Dikshita who lived in the seventeenth century, nobody could ordinarily be a minister who was not a pandit. That Kauṭilya was a pandit would certainly be no objection to his having been a minister, carrying on the actual administration of the state. We may therefore take it with Prof. Meyer that Kauṭilya, whether he be Kauṭilya or Kauṭalya, was the minister of that name who assisted Chandragupta in the establishment of, and in laying down the lines of the administration for, the Mauryan Empire.

This leads us to the point whether the administration that is depicted in the *Arthaśāstra* is an administration fit for a large empire such as that of Chandragupta came to be, or whether it is suitable only for a small kingdom surrounded by equally small kingdoms. It is hard to see where the distinction lay. Empires in India under the Hindus attempted to be no more than kingdoms, of a small compass comparatively, which gathered together under the aegis of the leading state, which went by the name of imperial state for the time being, other kingdoms constituting merely an expanding *maṇḍala* in political dependence. The administration that had to be carried on by the imperial state was a comparatively simple one, as by a well-established principle of devolution, most of the actual administration was carried

on by local bodies for comparatively small states. That remained the bedrock of civil administration and the administration of states, kingdoms and empires, was built upon this bedrock of ordered government. If that is granted, there is no difficulty in understanding that what seems to be laid down for a congeries of smaller states cannot be far different from what was necessary for a really imperial state. Examined in this light, it will be found that even the *Arthaśāstra* polity provides the machinery for carrying on the imperial administration as well as the administration of a comparatively small state. The fact that Kauṭilya lays down the means by which a state, placed in the middle of a number of states round about it of equal strength, can make conquests of its neighbours and become an imperial state is just what gives the indication that Chāṇakya helped to evolve from out of a powerful single state an empire, far flung and reaching to the frontiers which British statesmen, even of the twentieth century, have sighed for in vain, at least on one side of India.

The Central administration, as it is described, is administration of a centralized character which provides for the carrying on of only such part of the administration as falls to the lot of the imperial head-quarters. The actual details of the administration given in the work cannot be understood unless we postulate an efficient local administration for the rural localities as a whole, such as we are able to claim for periods much later than Kauṭilya in certain parts, but not necessarily one part of the whole of India. Local administration has to be studied in detail in the different localities of India, and it seems to be that they were of the same character in localities for which we have more information and in localities for which we seem to have almost

none. If that is granted, what is left to be administered by governments of petty kingdoms and broader ones did not differ much, and if, within this, a division is made, between the imperial head-quarters and the separate state head-quarters or provincial head-quarters, it cannot be difficult to understand that what the Kauṭīliyan administration in principle, as well as in the practical machinery, provided, would be adequate even for the requirements of the Mauryan Empire at its best.

That this is not altogether drawn from the imagination will become clear if a careful comparison be instituted between the Kauṭīliyan polity and the polity lying behind the inscriptions and edicts of Asoka. Such details as we get in the edicts of Asoka seem to go only to confirm that the polity behind the edicts is the Kauṭīliyan polity. There seems therefore no very particular incompatibility between the administration of a kingdom, even a comparatively small kingdom, and the Mauryan Empire so far as a treatise on political institutions can make out. What therefore the *Arthaśāstra* lays down as the necessary machinery of administration of the head-quarters of the kingdom, when understood properly, would prove to be adequate to the needs of the empire. Such details as we get of a real and reliable character from Megasthenes and writers of that kind would only go to confirm this position if too much is not made of differences and omissions that we may note in the account of Megasthenes as compared with that of the *Arthaśāstra*. 'The government contemplated by the *Kauṭīliya Arthaśāstra* appears to be that of a relatively small state, such as Magadha may have been in the early period of Chandragupta's reign, before his dominions had been much extended by conquests, and,

although the Mauryan Empire, when fully developed through the policy of systematic aggression inculcated in this treatise, was of the decentralized Indian type, each of its outlying provinces enjoying a measure of independence, yet it is natural to suppose that, by the time Pāṭaliputra had become the centre of a great federal state, a somewhat more elaborate form of administration had developed in the home provinces, and especially in the capital, than had sufficed for the original kingdom of Magadha. We may expect, then, to find in this *Arthaśāstra*, not exactly the administration described by Megasthenes, but institutions which might have grown in the course of a quarter of a century or thereabout into that described by him.'

This theory would be reasonable enough if we can be sure that there is such a difference in kind or character between the description that we get from Megasthenes for the administration of the city of Pāṭaliputra and what is laid down in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya. Judged by what we know of the administration of towns in later times, there seems to be nothing incompatible between the description given by Megasthenes and the institutions as described in the *Arthaśāstra*. Megasthenes probably attempted to describe to his countrymen, at least to the readers of Greek, the institutions as found in the Mauryan Empire in a way that they might understand. This necessity has naturally introduced modifications in the description which can hardly be regarded as an actual rendering in parts of the institutions that existed in Mauryan India. If we can make allowance for this, the differences shown do not amount to very much. We may therefore take it roughly that the institutions as described in the *Arthaśāstra* are more or less the Mauryan institutions as they obtained even in the imperial days

of Maurya rule. To quote again Monahan's *Early History of Bengal* :

'Megasthenes's account is obviously superficial and inaccurate, and, when all allowances have been made, there remain discrepancies which it is difficult to explain. But, on the whole, it seems that this theory bears the test indicated above, and that, for the purposes of history, the best means of arriving at an idea of the social conditions in Bihar and Bengal during the Maurya period will be by analysis of the *Kautiliya Arthaśāstra* and its comparison with the description attributed to Megasthenes and with the Asoka Edicts. There is evidence of the survival in those countries, in various forms and with diverse changes, through later centuries, of political institutions and the ories of the Maurya age, and to the *Arthaśāstra* we may look for elucidation of expressions occurring in records of the Gupta period in the fourth and fifth centuries of our era, of the time of Harṣa's Empire in the seventh, and of the Pāla and Sena Kings.'

Some hints in the records of the Āndhras of the Dekkan seem to tell the same tale. The account that follows attempts to reconstruct ancient Hindu administrative institutions on the lines sketched out above.

An account of the administrative machinery employed for carrying on the administration ought necessarily to consider first what exactly the ideas were that underlay this administrative machinery. It is obvious that a society must exist before it feels the necessity for an organization such as a state or government is. It is generally taken for granted that when society emerges from out of the stage of the mere group organizations of a primitive character and provides itself with a more general organization for carrying on the functions usually regarded as political or governmental, the idea of the state emerges.

In regard to the emergence of the state, the remarks

of a recent writer seem apt. 'The foregoing sketch may help us to understand the slow beginnings of the state and to justify our contention that the state is a structure not coeval and coextensive with society, but built within it, as a determined order for the attainment of specific ends. The earliest forms of state are extremely narrow in their aims and powers. They scarcely touch the inner purposes of the community which are in the far safer wardship of custom.'¹ While the Hindu notions of the state seem to agree with the above, the state according to them, does not emerge till after a considerable degree of travail in the life of society as a whole, but comes into existence almost in the same manner as elsewhere. It is therefore necessary first of all to determine what exactly was the order that was introduced, how, and for what practical ends. As far as the sources for Hindu Political Institutions go, they seem to agree in this, that society has had a comparatively long period of existence and made an attempt to pursue particular ends of corporate life, and at a certain stage of the existence of society in this manner, the discovery was made that the natural tendency of group life showed itself in the practical assertion of the principle, might is right. Finding that such an unstable position did not conduce to the well-being of society as a whole, society made an effort to devise some kind of machinery to preserve order, and permit of progress of the separate groups, constituting society, prosecuting each its own particular ends. Thus emerged the state of the Hindus, according to such evidence as we have for the origin of the state.

What was it that people living in a society wished to pursue, in what manner did they actually suffer in the

¹ MacIver : *The Modern State*, p. 40.

pursuit of their ends, and what exactly was the form of the institution that they provided themselves for preventing this? To answer these questions, it would be necessary to know what was the ultimate ideal of society among the Hindus and what they regarded as the ultimate aim of that society. Societies existed with a view to subserve the ends that men in society sought when they reached a certain degree of culture, namely, their well-being here, and similar well-being hereafter when they came to recognize a hereafter. As far as our sources containing political discussions go, we do not reach to a state of Hindu society when they had not yet developed a state of hereafter, towards which they had to shape their life, and that hereafter was attainable by the several groups, perhaps in several ways, for which orderly pursuit of their fixed aims, they required the protection of a settled administration. They therefore postulated their Dharma; and the pursuit of Dharma is necessarily life in this world with a view to the attainment of the ultimate aim of all Dharma, the life in the next. Hence they divided the main objects of existence of man as four, Dharma, Artha, Kāma and Moksha; and in treating of politics and economics, they naturally took into consideration the first three alone, as having to do with life here, leaving the fourth, the life hereafter, to follow as a matter of course according to the character of the life here. Hence came in the category, Trivarga, as opposed to the four Purushārthas. Trivarga is the first three items enumerated above of the four. Moksha is the ultimate Purushārtha and therefore does not directly come within the purview of any Government.

Life in society, we have therefore to presume, actually was for the purpose of prosecuting Dharma ultimately, in its four divisions. Life in these four divisions,

'the four aims of man' in practical life, reduced itself to the prosecution of the first three of these four, namely, Dharma, Artha and Kāma. Dharma here may be taken to be conduct proper to one's station and circumstances. Artha is the honourable and legitimate earning of the means by which to prosecute the general Dharma of one's duty in life, and Kāma may be interpreted generally as the legitimate enjoyment of that which is really worth enjoying in life. When these are done in the proper place and in the prescribed form, life in society would receive its fulfilment in the prosecution of Dharma as a whole, by leading to the real and happy life hereafter, whatever be the ultimate shape of this life. The idea of Trivarga and its position as the guiding factor of social life seems at once to imply that, whatever kind of social life was contemplated and whatever the organizations that were projected for the carrying on of these were, life in society contemplated a society already composed of various and perhaps even varying groups. Where various groups are congregated to prosecute common life in society, the first essential seems to be the deterring of the stronger groups from doing anything detrimental to the pursuit of life by the weaker or less fortunate groups in their neighbourhood. This can be done only by a supervisory authority which could see to it that each group pursued its life with a freedom which guaranteed a similar life of freedom to other groups to pursue their lives. The organization called for therefore is primarily an organization whose principal function was the doing of justice by administering punishment upon the erring, and that is what the Hindus meant by the term *Dandanīti*, a life of discipline enforced by punishment.

The organization called into existence had therefore

primarily to discharge the duty of punishing those that molested others and prevented, or in any manner hindered, the pursuit of the life of duty according to their own notions. With the emergence of the authority, emerges a governmental organization from society, and with the emergence of this organization emerges the state as distinct from society.

According to our sources, the state seems to have originated in one of two ways, either by an appeal to a superior being who provided the actual man for shouldering the responsibility of Dandānīti and administering the state ; or, more secularly, by an agreement between the most powerful individual or group in society on the one side, and of the rest on the other. These two are the characteristically Brahmanical, and somewhat more secular and Buddhistic, account of the origin of the state as we have it in Indian sources. Whichever way the state originated, the state had the same function to discharge, namely, the prevention of social life lapsing into what they called *mātsyanyāya*, the greater or the more powerful destroying the lesser or the weaker. In both cases alike, the person responsible for Dandānīti had to do his responsible work with unflinching impartiality, and had to be put upon a footing of independence to do that. The individual, or the group or organization, therefore, was provided with whatever may have been requisite for the efficient discharge of this onerous duty. That feature again is common to the two sources, namely, the sacerdotal as well as the lay, and was so clearly understood that, in later times, legal minded people could set about discussing whether the monarch for the time being, who, from another point of view, was regarded as invested with a very considerable amount of divinity, was more than a paid servant of the state discharging his duties and

receiving his emoluments in return therefor. In the net result, therefore, society, as conceived in India, was constituted of groups of varying capacities and the object of the state was to order social life in such a fashion that each group may prosecute its own particular life according to its own special ideals unhampered in the pursuit thereof by a similar pursuit of life's ideals by other groups stronger and weaker alike. Naturally, therefore, the actual religious ideas relating to the other life underlying such a social organization could well be left to the separate groups, and the common organization may content itself with merely seeing to it that each group pursued its life according to its lights.

Jātijānapadān dharmān Śrēṇi dharmaṁscha dharmavit
Samikshya kuladharmānscha svadharmam pratipālayēt.

Manu. viii. 41.

Śrēṇi naigama pāshandī gaṇānāmapiyayam vidhiḥ
Bhēdanchaishām nṛpo rakshēt pūrva vṛttimcha pālayēt.

Yagñ. ii. 195.

The kind of organization required to carry on an administration such as is projected above, ought to be one of absolute impartiality, and above all suspicion in that particular. It is with a view to this that the original compact is made to provide, and place on an immutable basis, the emoluments of the sovereign ruler; whose function it was to assure the impartial administration of Dandānīti. The question would naturally arise as to the guarantee that the person thus entrusted with the administration, assured of ample provision for himself, could give for the carrying on of the administration in the public interest and not degenerate into one who conducted it in his own individual interest. This was assured to Hindu society in various ways. The administration and the administrative machinery was not

entrusted with the legislative or law-making functions. To begin with, law was synonymous with custom apparently. Even when it became necessary to enact law, the enactment usually took on the form of the standard treatises of famous law-givers. These were in the beginning customary laws, as understood in particular schools of teachers, incorporating in it custom that was considered valid and approved by the worthy. As time changed and law itself changed sufficiently, the change was brought about by a new redaction undertaken, it may be, by a very prominent representative teacher of the school, or by a school as a whole receiving the approval of the learned. In still later stages of development, when the so-called Sūtra text-books or Śāstra text-books got to be fixed, commentators took on the role of incorporating in the body of laws such changes as had come in, by their commentaries. In other words, as varying practices grew and approved themselves to the learned and worthy members of the society whom it affected, the changed state of things became the law thenceforward. Laws being therefore given by Āchāryas and approved of the learned, were beyond the sphere of the administration, whatever its character.

Therefore the king and his agents who carried on the government were as much subject to the law as the subjects themselves. The king could not change the law in his own favour except to the extent that an administrator of the law could introduce changes in administering law. This absence of legislative power in the administration takes away one important influence that had a tendency to make the ruler degenerate into an autocrat. Next, the ruler was placed in a way above the life of society and therefore out of the struggles of self-interest

for appropriating that which is worthy of appropriation. Being assured of fair means and not being thrown into the current of ordinary life, the administrative head could hold the balance even as between the various groups composing society under his rule. Thirdly, he was constantly reminded that the welfare of society over which he was placed, is his own welfare and unhappiness of those under his care was the surest way of ensuring his unhappiness here and eternal suffering hereafter, popular ill-will in the world here below and the reward of playing false with a trust in the life to come. Law-giver after law-giver went on emphasizing this and placing it prominently before him. The term Raja, by which the ruler was generally known, was interpreted as one whose function was to please the people, 'Rāja prakriti ranjanāt', so that it became almost a habit with him to feel, in the language of Queen Victoria.—'In their prosperity will be our strength, in their contentment our security, and in their gratitude our best reward.' The same idea occurs in such distinct works as the *Vishnu Samhita* and the *Arthasāstra* of Kauṭilya.

Prajā sukhē sukho rājā ṭaddukhē yascha dukkhitāḥ
Sa Kīrttiyuktō lokēsmin prētya svargē mahīyatē.

Vishnu iii. 70.

Prajā sukhē sukham rājñāḥ prajāñāmcha hitē hitam
Nātmapriyam hitam rajñāḥ prajāñāmtu priyam hitam.

Kaut. Artha S. I. 19.

Raja Dharma, as the proper discharge of the functions of the king, came to be regarded as of such vital importance to society that failure to carry that out properly involved nothing less than the destruction of society as a whole—destruction of society brought on by the remissness of the person or persons whose function it actually was to protect society from another kind of

destruction which was considered the natural concomitant of social life without this essential administrative machinery.

Majjēt trayī Daṇḍanītau hatāyām
 Sarvē dharmāḥ prakshayēyur viruddhāḥ
 Sarvē dharmāschāśramaṇām hatāsyuḥ
 Kshātrē nashṭē Rāja dharmē purāṇē.

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Ā payan kuṅṇum arutoḷilōr nūl maṇappar
 Kāvalan kāvānenin.

Kural 560.

‘ COTTAGE ’
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MADRAS

S. KRISHNASWAMI AIYANGAR.

October 8, 1929.

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