

Research Article

Exploring Nuristan: A Study of Social Dynamics and Ethical Roots

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ABSTRACT



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Nuristan is situated south of the Hindu Kush Mountain range in the eastern provinces of Afghanistan. The ELINA tribe appears to have been the first group to settle in the southern Hindu Kush, especially in the rich regions of Nuristan, according to historical documents spanning more than 2000 years. Alexander the Great attempted to traverse Nuristan with his army during one of his military operations in order to reach India. Alexander and his warriors encountered fierce resistance in the western regions of Nuristan, but were welcomed with open arms by the people of KAMDISH in the eastern region. They were able to enter India as a result. Nuristan, sometimes referred to as the world's museum, has been the subject of in-depth inquiry by both domestic and international scholars. Raising animals including goats, sheep, and cows was a major part of the ancient Nuristan people's livelihood and supported the local economy. During this time, a person's social standing was determined by their military prowess, bravery, and ability to get dinner invitations. These achievements brought significant titles like BATOR, JISHT, DENG BATOR, and DAL ODA to the individuals. The gift of medals, signs, and symbols like KIRA, SHETOMA, HOSHNEK, and PANUK served as acknowledgement. The historical background of Nuristan and the socioeconomic division in the region are examined in this research. People with unique cultural characteristics have lived here for innumerable centuries. The main goal is to shed light on Nuristan's unique cultural practices and historical context.

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Introduction

There exist two primary narratives regarding the genesis of the Nuristani population. The Nuristanis are said to possess a cultural legacy that can be traced back to the Greek warriors who conquered the province in 327 B.C. during the invasion led by Alexander the Great. According to an alternative interpretation of their cultural heritage, the Nuristani tribes are believed to have a connection with the ancient Qureish tribe, which is the same group that Mohammed the Prophet was a part of. According to legend, following the establishment of Mecca as the focal point of Islam, many members of the Qureish tribe departed from present-day Saudi Arabia and journeyed to Afghanistan in order to safeguard their previous religious beliefs. There is a belief among certain Nuristanis that this particular group had an influence on the establishment of the Nuristani tribes. Western research suggests that the Nuristani people are likely a subgroup of the Indo-Iranian tribes (Dalrymple, 1989). These tribes migrated prior to the main Indo-European migration from the southern Indus River basin to northern Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan. The Nuristani people were ultimately displaced from Kandahar and Kabul and relocated to the Kama region, situated near the junction of the Kabul and Kunar rivers, due to the entrance of the Indo-Europeans. Approximately one thousand years ago, the Nuristanis relocated to the highlands, specifically to the

upper Pech and Laghman rivers, following the establishment of an Islamic Turkish state by Mahmud Ghazni in the Kabul River valley. They may now be found here (Nuristanis in Afghanistan, n.d.).


The Nuristanis, a prominent tribe in Afghanistan, possess a unique culture that captivates the attention of several scholars specializing in Eastern culture and art. Despite its location within the imposing peaks and valleys of the Hindukush Mountains, Nuristan has been extensively studied to examine its cultural, social, and anthropological intricacies. Over the course of history, Nuristan has been known by various names such as Dardistan, Bloristan, Katoristan, Kafirstan, and lastly, Nuristan during the reign of Amir Abdul Rahman Khan. This region has been historically referred to by other appellations, such as the land of people donning black, people donning white, and people donning red, all of whom are regarded as non-believers. These names have strong associations with specific human characteristics, geographical features, and religious beliefs, which in turn result in particular ethnic categorizations (GulMomand, 2022).

Dardistan:

The inhabitants of Nuristan have been classified as Dardi, and their territory has been designated as Dardistan. Anthropological linguists frequently use this terminology. The

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term 'Dardistan' can be found in Indian writings as 'Darda,' and the Greek historian Herodotus mentioned the Dardi people living in the northern mountains of Kandahar. Strabo identified them as the Dardayee, a prominent Indian tribe residing in the mountains. Bethlehem explicitly identified Kandahar and Dardayee as Dardayees, whereas Velianus referred to them as Darda. The Dardayees, a significant ancient tribe, formerly occupied the northeastern territories of Aryana and currently inhabit particular portions of Nuristan and Chitral. Wala Dobosn, a French tourist, states that the Dardis of ancient times were renowned for their strong connection to their homeland. Their language is distinguished by its profound historical roots and includes words with an esteemed origin. Garyerson observed that the language spoken by the people of Besaka, known as Besaka language, bears a remarkable similarity to the grammatical structure of Paragrets Indian language, also known as Pesaka. Nevertheless, the dominant designation for their language continues to be Dardis (GulMomand, 2022).

Academics have determined that the Dardis language was used by people known as Dardi who resided in the central parts of Abasen circa 1000 B.C. After comparing the Dardik language to Dardid, as documented by the Greek historian Herodotus, it was determined that the territory of Dadik encompassed Gandaharis and other Hakhamanshes tribes. Both Dardis and Gandaharis were essential components of the Hakhamanshi cultural environment, which included Kashmir and several mountainous regions that are today essential to the Dardis. Linguistic anthropologists view the inhabitants of Nuristan as important members of the Dardi tribes, and their language is acknowledged as a distinct component of the larger Dardi language.

Bloristan:

Blor or Blawr is an ancient name with strong historical ties to the region of Nuristan. Bartold states that there are persons with darker skin who still self-identify as Blor, a name that may be found in Chinese literature dating back to the 18th century. Haidar Doghalt, who reigned until 632 A.C, governed a vast region that spanned from Kashmir to Kabul, reaching northwards to Yakand and encompassing Kashmir, Kashgar, Blor, and Bloristan. In his work "Afghanistan and a Glance at Its History," Ghulam Mohammad Ghobar provides a clear definition of Blor or Blawr as a province located in the northeastern region of Afghanistan. It is surrounded by Badakhshan province to the north, Gandahar province to the south, Kashmir to the east, and Gandhara Nejrab and Panjshir Valley to the west. Bloristan, according to Sir Henry Pol, a distinguished geographer, is a region known as Kafirstan province. It is inhabited by disillusioned worshippers and stretches from Kabul to Kashmir. In medieval Asian terminology, it is referred to as Bahama (Belawar) (Hallam, 1902).

Blor, as its name suggests, refers to a smooth and shiny vessel that symbolizes the hilly terrain of Bloristan. The residents, who are acclimated to frigid climates, take pride in their pale and smooth complexion, impressive stature, blue eyes, and naturally curly golden hair, while considering their biological characteristics. The term Bloristan originates from the rugged topography of its mountains and the unique physical and environmental characteristics of its inhabitants. Blor is mentioned in Tabaqat-I Nasiri as part of Alawodin's efforts to free himself from the vengeance of Ghazni and the demolition of castles. Alaud din Khilji gathered warriors from Ghor and Takharistan, exerting considerable efforts to achieve victory. Fakhruddin was sent to Bamyan and successfully gained control over the area that stretches from the Sheghnan mountains in Takharistan to the Blor border, which includes Turkistan and Badakhshan (Jüzjāni, 2006). Our argument is that

Blor and Bloria are equivalent to present-day Nuristan, and it maintained the names Blor and Bloristan until the era of Babur.

Katoristan:

Amir Timur attempted to attack India by passing via Kafirstan. During his journey, he came across a group of individuals who were attired in black clothing. The ruler of this tribe was known as Kator. The term Katar or Katoor specifically denotes the prominent tribes of Nuristan in modern times, originating from the word Kedara, who was the final monarch of the Koshanian dynasty. According to Abo Raihan Alberoni, Laktorman was the final ruler of Kabul Shahan, and his brahmani minister, Kalar, seized control of the entire kingdom to form the Brahmani Shahan kingdom. In his writings, Hodiyyar establishes a connection between Alberoni's Katorman and Katoor, the former name for Kafirstan and the present-day Nuristan. Amir Timur conquered India and advanced into the northern regions of Afghanistan, eventually arriving at Andarab in the Hindukush Mountain range (Motamidy, 1991). Upon becoming aware of sporadic assaults carried out by the black-clad Katoors in the adjacent areas, he made the decision to proactively thwart these invasions originating from the northern sections of Khawak and Panjshir. Amir Timur advanced towards Katoor and Bloristan, triumphing over the most arduous landscapes. Utilizing a tactical approach in which he employed a basket to navigate down snow-covered slopes, he effectively conquered the area in spite of multiple obstacles and severe weather conditions. Amir Timur memorialized this triumph by engraving it on a stone and depositing it in the Kator valley. The Katoors demonstrated their bravery by forcefully opposing foreign aggression. They did so by wearing a unique all-black military uniform and utilizing military strategies gained from multiple wars and conflicts.

Nilab Rahimi did a study on the reciprocal interaction between the inhabitants of Panjshir and Nuristan. It was observed that these two regions had adjacent boundaries and a historical record of offering reciprocal aid in material and economic affairs. Nevertheless, there were occurrences of theft attacks amongst them. Baba Qalandar Paryane, a religious figure and poet, lamented the loss of his son, attributing his death to those from Nuristan who were dressed in black clothing (Katoors). He crafted an extensive plea directed towards Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, and within his poetry, two lines are particularly notable:

نه ترکم نه تاجیک نه ایرانی ام ز نسل شهینداد پریانی ام
من از دست کنور بجان آمده ام طلبگار شاه جهان آمده ام

"I do not belong to the Turk, Tajik, or Iranian ethnic groups." I belong to the Paryane lineage. I harbor the greatest anger for Katoor, and I am loyal to the ruler of the entire universe.

Black and White Wears Infidels:

The territory of Nuristan extends as far as Wakhan. He claims that the fortresses and caverns in the Wakhan region were owned by Nuristan. In the 11th century, the territory of Nuristan acquired the name Kafirstan as a result of Muslim invasions. During certain historical epochs, the territory was known as Kafirstan, and its residents were categorized as black-eared non-believers, white non-believers, red non-believers, black-garbed non-believers, and white-garbed non-believers. Among these groups, the residents of Katoor were identified as "black wears" because of their unique black attire, while the people of Nuristan, who wore white garments, were referred to as "white wears." As adherents of pagan faiths who did not

embrace Islam, they were referred to as black infidels or white infidels. Hieun tsang a Chinese visitor undertaking research on Afghanistan's population emphasized the differences between individuals who wear black and those who wear white, referring to them as infidels (Beal, 1884). In 1896, Robertson, an English researcher, authored the book "Hindukush Infidels," which offers captivating insights on the dress of the Nuristan people. (Johnson, 2013) Tsang Highlights that the Nuristanis fashioned their garments using animal skins and embellished them with mounted horns, creating a unique and recognizable fashion style. Marco Polo, a renowned explorer, recognized the existence of Nuristanis in the vicinity of the Hindukush Mountains. He located their territory in the northern region of Peshawar and described them as unbelievers who wore black clothing (Polo, 2002).

Nuristanis were categorized as infidels based on their attire, specifically as red wears, black wears, and white wears, for various reasons. In recent years, residents of Kamdish, Kamo, Merwish, Batangal, Bazgol, Kordens, Konia, and Aormar, who were in close proximity to the border, acquired white clothes from the neighboring region. As a result, they were labeled as unbelievers who wear white. Moreover, these folks possessed white sheep and made use of their sheepskins for garments, which further reinforced their association as non-believers who wore white attire. The residents of the Kanto or Laghman valley regions, specifically Waigal, Koshtoz, Mandgal, and Barge Matal, belonged to the Kamtoze tribes and were commonly referred to as black clothes. The inhabitants of these locations, under the influence of their culture, physical surroundings, and livestock management techniques, created unique garments using animal hides. Both males and females in these regions embellished themselves with these distinctive garments. The animals often possessed black skin, hence the costumes created from the soft goat skins were also black and were connected together. Two little jackets were crafted from two additional hides. Wakil Abdullah Khan, a respected individual in the area, recounts that Amir Abdul Rahman Khan employed the names "black" and "white" to describe the inhabitants of these regions. This differentiation became apparent when a cohort of individuals attended the court of the Amir, with some clad in black woolen garments and others adorned in white robes crafted from animal skins. From that moment on, these expressions were widely embraced (Wais, 2023).

Division of society

A province is deemed to have had a prosperous and enduring history if it possesses nobility. The indigenous population of Nuristan comprises 90% of the total population and plays a significant role in shaping the province's human geography. These programs possess the capacity to greatly enhance the country's historical heritage by promoting the resurgence of the indigenous and traditional cultures in the region. Nuristan has a crucial role in preserving the cultural heritage of neighboring countries, where tourism is expanding and local hospitality businesses are being developed, as well as in the hilly portions of the province. Although Nuristan's native culture is geographically and geologically distinct, it is currently being swiftly supplanted by an itinerant, foreign civilization (Farhang, 1992). The social division was established based on the dichotomy between the privileged Etrogen class and the oppressed Brojen class. The term "estrogen" can be classified into the following categories:

I. Outa (Clergymen): Clergymen held the religious leadership of Nuristani society. They conducted prayers and sacrifice ceremonies, occasionally paying attention to the psychological well-being of the people.

II. Maldah-Orgo (Nobles): This caste wielded significant influence in society, holding the reins of power within the

village. The individuals in this group bestowed upon themselves surnames indicative of their elevated social status. Those bearing titles such as Jmeshed, Mesedenk, Bator, Shorahmach, Botoro, and others were individuals celebrated for their bravery and prowess on the battlefield, as well as for hosting elaborate and costly invitations and receptions (166:16).

Mohammad Safar Qharze, in his work on Nuristan, wrote:

According to Qharze, the social structure and position surnames of Nuristanis were intricately linked to acts of bravery, vendettas, and societal recognition. Achieving a surname like Shorahmach signified not only bravery and sufficiency but also commanded higher altitude and respect compared to other surnames like Jest or Dinek Bator, which were attained through ranching, assets, and banquets. To reach such positions, individuals often engaged in heroic deeds, including killing a specified number of enemies.

The progression of surnames in Nuristan started with the killing of one enemy, leading to the Majmal surname, and individuals with this title could display two hawk's populous in front of their caps. As one's kill count increased, they could earn a turban, a hawk's populous, a special stick, a bend, and even a turban with the corona of a golden hen.

The Dalloda or owner of the flag, the highest social position, was achieved by killing 18 enemies. Dallodaes held significant influence and responsibilities in village affairs in Nuristan society. The social hierarchy also included lower positions with regular costs among the people in their respective shifts.

The awarding of bonuses and social positions had a political basis. It served to unite people through expensive receptions, leading to collective decisions against common enemies. This practice fostered bravery and a strong defense of their land, motivating Nuristanis. The social positions were not only symbolic but also had practical implications in organizing the community against external threats (Shorah, 1955).

Another significant aspect of Nuristani society highlighted by Qharze is the Yaksis, who were considered important individuals. However, due to social tensions, they sometimes faced contempt and insults from others, leading to instances of revenge. Poor members of society often served the wealthy, resulting in the loss of many rights and a year-round servitude to the rich.

Borjen (Slaves):

The system of slavery persisted in Nuristan until the influence of Islamic centuries. During ancient times, Nuristanis would convert martial prisoners into slaves and sell them within the region or to other areas. In Kamdesh village, there existed a slave market where not only local slaves but also those from neighboring regions were sold (Robertson, 1900). It was common for each family in Kamdesh to have around 20 slaves, and the wealthier families could have up to 180 slaves. This form of slavery was particularly prevalent in Kolkha village, where the cost of an experienced slave in the buying and selling market was equivalent to twelve oxen. A proverb from that time highlighted that the best young slave could be found in Kafirstan

The slaves, known as Brojen, were further divided into two categories: Baries and Showelaes, with Baries engaging in crafts like blacksmithing, home-making, engraving, and carpentry. Showelaes, on the other hand, were individuals taken from the battlefield and assigned to perform laborious tasks.

The professional skills varied between Baries and Showelaes. Baries excelled in crafts such as blacksmithing, jewelry making, and weaving, while Showelaes demonstrated proficiency in knitting Jorms, Kolali, and matting. They crafted litter for corns and created special eating desks and Tokrees

from unique woods. Showelae were entirely under the control of their owners, who could utilize their physical strength and skills for personal tasks or sell them in the slave market. According to some accounts, owners were unable to sell Baries in the market, but they could leverage their professional skills. Baries sometimes played crucial roles in ceremonial events arranged by their owners and managed their own basic needs in a relatively independent manner. In 1816, Islam was introduced to Nuristan by Amir Abdul Rahman Khan, leading to the transformation of the region's name from Kafirstan to Nuristan and the complete abolition of the slave system.

Symbols and Signs:

As previously mentioned, in Nuristan, individuals of special social standing were bestowed with symbols and distinct signs, often in recognition of bravery and hosting receptions. These symbols held not only social esteem and position but also served as a crucial foundation for delving into the ancient history of Nuristan (Shorah, 1955).

Among the significant symbols were:

Kora: A symbol of paramount importance, the Kora represented not only social standing but also played a crucial role in uncovering the historical roots of Nuristan.

Shtoma: Another notable symbol, Shtoma, carried both social and historical significance, providing insights into the ancient heritage of the region.

Sowobnenk: This symbol, like the others, held a dual significance, signifying both social esteem and a valuable resource for excavating the history of Nuristan.

Panot: Yet another symbol contributing to the social and historical fabric of Nuristan, Panot was esteemed for its cultural and traditional implications. These symbols and signs not only adorned individuals with social honors but also provided a rich tapestry for exploring the ancient heritage and traditions of Nuristan.

Shuras and ceremonies:

In ancient Nuristan, various issues were resolved through native councils, and one such competent organ was the native council itself. Each village selected separate representatives to address their unique problems, appointing one of them as the chief of representatives. The chief was required to be a person of honesty, merit, and bravery, respected among the tribe, capable of defending the people and their interests. This central representative, known as Jest, and their chief, called Owr Jest, had judges, soldiers, and administrators at their disposal, ensuring a smooth and conflict-free functioning of the council (Tazah, 1988). Internal guards, known as "kandi" or "shazi," were selected from among fifty individuals to protect the village for ten days, stationed in strategic locations such as hills.

Fifteen was considered the legal age for defending the lush lands of Nuristan, as individuals reaching this age were deemed capable of shouldering a gun and defending against external threats. Given the constant internal conflicts and external attacks in ancient Nuristan, families instilled a sense of bravery in their offspring from a young age. This practice was known as "Beda pala."

Decisions made in the native council were not merely theoretical but were put into practice, with specific penalties assigned for convicts. For instance, in cases of assault on a woman, the aggressor had to pay double the dowry to the woman's husband. In the case of murder, the killer had to pay a ransom or face exile to a distant region. The system of penalties, known as "Naffa," served as a deterrent to crime.

In the present day, decisions are made in accordance with Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) law, and important matters are resolved through collective decision-making in community

gatherings, where every individual has the right to voice their opinion. In a conversation with a Nuristani named Jagran Abdul Mohammad Khan, he highlighted the historical practice of forming colonies, known as "Hellad" or peace, to address various issues. Colonies played a crucial role in settling disputes and crimes, ensuring justice and fairness.

There were two types of colonies: one for resolving disputes and issues, and another known as the "Owry" colony, which served as an executive organ in the lives of ancient Nuristanis. The Owry colony was led by a Jest person named Owr Jest and was responsible for various governmental functions, decision-making, and overseeing village activities. The duty period of Owry colony members was one year, with members elected through popular votes. Crimes were categorized based on the age of the criminals. Another colony, more prestigious and powerful, brought together Barsouch people, authorities, and jests, serving as a central body to address the destiny and matters of the village members.

While the latter type of colony no longer exists, the tradition of Owry colonies continues in present-day Nuristan. The colony system has persisted over time, adapting to local needs and challenges, and remains a means of resolving disputes and maintaining order in Nuristani villages (Tazah, 1988).

Ceremonies:

Nuristanis engaged in numerous ceremonies and jubilees to celebrate various occasions. These events were observed across different regions of ancient Nuristan, each with its unique customs and similarities. For instance, among the Kelsha or Kelkha tribes, two main ceremonies were held—one in spring and another in fall (Nuristanis in Afghanistan, n.d.).

1. The New Year Ceremony or Vernal Eid:

This ceremony took place at the end of the Hout month, approximately corresponding to March 19th. Before sunrise, women and girls began cooking, swept the area around their rooms, and believed that the spirits of their ancestors returned to the family. They sprinkled water around the room. Once the food was prepared, relatives and neighbors visited each other's houses quietly to partake in the meal. The entire village gathered at a designated location, a common practice in all villages. People engaged in dancing, singing epic songs, and reciting eulogies. As night fell, everyone joined a party hosted by a particularly generous person who extended the invitation to the whole community (Robertson, 1896).

These ceremonies were an integral part of Nuristani life, fostering community bonds and celebrating significant milestones in the agricultural and seasonal cycles.

2. Autumnal Ceremony or Eid:

This Eid was celebrated in ancient Nuristan when the people had finished collecting tree products and brought their animals back to their areas. The purpose of this ceremony was to reflect on the past year and provide respite from the year's work. The picnic extended from night until day and featured special ceremonies, songs, and dances, with the active participation of girls. The ceremony involved determining the nature of the New Year, bringing this message to the people, and celebrating the New Year with a joyous ceremony. While the autumnal ceremony ceased with the advent of Islam, the vernal ceremony continued for some years (Robertson, 1896).

According to Robertson, who lived in Nuristan for a year, there were twelve important and fundamental celebrations, most of which he witnessed in Kamdesh village (Kakar, 2006). These celebrations included:

1. Keash or the New Year ceremony
2. Veron
3. Taleska
4. Marenma
5. Dooban
6. Azendra
7. Demeran
8. Gerdolo
9. Patelo
10. Dezany Do
11. Monzelo
12. Nelo

These celebrations involved evening dances and songs, with the exception of the Azendra celebration, which was organized for various sports. Religious leaders and elders attended these ceremonies, sitting in specific places. Additionally, in Katba village, there were other ceremonies like Keje, Namej, Nelon, Shetry, Jela, Natt, Keji, and Naron. In addition to these general ceremonies with religious foundations, Nuristan also hosted ceremonies related to social positions, sacrifices for gods, joyous celebrations, and smaller ceremonies for events like birth, circumcision, coming-of-age for boys, and weddings (Tazah, 1988). According to an interview with Abdul Mohammad Khan Nuristani, special ceremonies were held for the birth of a son. During the circumcision, known as Pennar, invitations were arranged, meals were shared, and dancing and singing of songs commenced. Another ceremony involved ear-piercing (Soun), where youths, musicians, and children gathered in a specific place for dance parties, ear-piercing, and the placement of golden earrings in one ear.

Conclusion

The Nuristani people categorize themselves into fifteen distinct ethnic subgroups within their tribe. The Nuristani people have traditionally pledged their loyalty to one of several small factions that are continuously involved in conflicts with each other. An "agnatic group" refers to a cluster of ethnic groups in Nuristani that have a common lineage of descent. Prior to the dissemination of Islam, it was prohibited for individuals of the opposite sex to marry within their extended kinship networks. Conversely, the Pashtuns actively pursue marriages with their cousins. In 1929, the Kom clan initiated notable intertribal battles, whereas in 1998, it was the kSto Nuristani clan who instigated such hostilities. Nevertheless, the communities of Nuristan have united to address the persistent cultural intrusion that has afflicted them for thousands of years. The Nuristani factions persist in opposing the influx of new ethnic groups into their land. In the late 1960s, the Nuristani tribes initiated an offensive against the Gujar and MiswaNi tribes, who were encroaching on their grazing territories. The Nuristani people reside in the southern Hindu Kush mountains, surrounded by the Alingar River to the west, the Pech River in the middle, and the Landai Sin and Kunar rivers to the east. Before the conclusive identification of these languages as a separate branch of the Indo-Iranian language family, they were often classified either as Iranian or Indo-Aryan languages. The

majority of Nuristanis consist of individuals belonging to the Janaderi Branch and the Kata Family. The Nuristani tribes, specifically the Gabor, Buburat, Ayun, Broze, Mastuj, and Kata, reside in Ozhor, which is now called Karimabad. These tribes are part of the Janaderi society. The famous Kata Bont rock, situated in close proximity to Karimabad (Juwara), is intricately associated with the Kata community. In Chitrali, the term "bont" corresponds to the English word "stone". Contrary to the Pashtuns, the Nuristani do not possess a distinct tribal organization. Nevertheless, they persist in identifying themselves based on the names of the particular locations where they live. Thirty-one of the designations come from the east-west valley, while eleven come from the north-south valley.

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