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Arbitrary Practices Towards Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (232-247 AH / 845-861 CE) as Mentioned in the Book "Al-Mukhtasar Fi Akhbar Al-Bashar" by Abu Al-Fida (732 AH / 1331 CE)

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Abstract

The assassination of Caliph al-Mutawakkil marked the initiation of a political conspiracy devised to eliminate an Abbasid caliph. This event underscored the extent of arbitrary practices suffered by the Abbasid caliphs during the era of Turkish influence (232-334 AH/843-945 AD). The Turkish leaders employed various tactics to diminish the role and prestige of the Abbasid caliphs, reducing them to a state akin to captives under their authority. They appointed and dismissed caliphs at will, weaving intricate conspiracies against them, notably targeting Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who fell victim to such plots. Consequently, this led to their dominance over the cornerstones of the Abbasid caliphate until the advent of the Buyids in 334 AH/945 AD.

Keywords: *Abu al-Fadl, al-Mutawakkil, Turks, Arbitrary Practices*

Introduction

In our titled research, "Arbitrary Practices Towards Caliph al-Mutawakkil (232-247 AH/845-861 AD) as Mentioned in the Book Al-Mukhtasar fi Akhbar al-Bashr by Abu al-Fadl (732 AH/1331 AD)," we present a study that enriches the reader's understanding of the motives and objectives behind the assassination of Caliph al-Mutawakkil and the arbitrary practices employed therein, as documented in the aforementioned book. The primary objective of this study is to uncover the arbitrary practices carried out by the Turks towards Caliph al-Mutawakkil, shedding light on the weakened position of the caliphate in dealing with them. Additionally, we emphasize the goals resulting from this assassination, focusing on the objectives of the research, which include revealing the arbitrary policies of Turkish leaders during the era of Turkish influence, their control over the caliphs, and elucidating the stance of weak caliphs, particularly Caliph al-Mutawakkil, towards them.

First Axis - Turkish Leaders' Intervention in the Ascension of Al-Mutawakkil to the Caliphate (232 AH/247 AD)

The selection of al-Mutawakkil for the caliphate was facilitated by Turkish support, as the preceding caliph, al-Wathiq (227-232 AH/832-846 AD), left the caliphate without a designated heir. After al-Wathiq, no successor was appointed [Al-Douri, 1945, p. 140; Taqous, 2011, p. 172; Fawzi, n.d., p. 360]. Al-Wathiq did not consider his brother, al-Mutawakkil, suitable for

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the caliphate. He was dissatisfied with his brother's actions and even his attire [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 154; Ibn Miskawayh, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 287; Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992, Vol. 11, p. 187]. Al-Wathiq appointed individuals to monitor and investigate al-Mutawakkil's activities, reporting them to him [Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 14, p. 464; Ibn Khaldun, 1981, Vol. 3, p. 341].

Therefore, after the death of Caliph al-Wathiq, Turkish leaders and senior statesmen convened to choose the new caliph. Some proposed allegiance to Muhammad ibn al-Wathiq, but others rejected this candidate supported by the minister Ibn al-Ziyat due to his young age and the belief that it was not permissible to pray behind him [Ibn Miskawayh, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 278; Ibn Kathir, 1997, Vol. 14, p. 328]. The Turks succeeded in appointing their candidate, al-Mutawakkil, after finding no interest in appointing Muhammad ibn al-Wathiq [Abu al-Fadl, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 37]. This took place in the events of the year 232 AH/847 AD. They then brought al-Mutawakkil, and Ahmed ibn Abi Duaad, who was a judge, crowned him with the turban, kissed him between his eyes, and said, "Peace be upon you, Commander of the Faithful" [Abu al-Fadl, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 37], within the events of the year 232 AH/847 AD. The incident of al-Mutawakkil's appointment by the Turks was considered a significant and perilous turning point in the Abbasid caliphate, as the tradition of caliphs being appointed through the designation of a crown prince by the caliph himself, without external interference, was disrupted [Al-Mawardi, n.d., p. 32].

This further solidified the Turkish leaders' control over the state's political, administrative, and military affairs [Al-Douri, 1945, p. 14; Taqoush, 2011, p. 172; Fawzi, n.d., p. 360]. The extent of this control became intolerable for Caliph al-Mutawakkil, leading to a conflict between him and the Turkish leaders. He attempted to resist their influence and constrain their power after they tightened their grip on the caliphate [Al-Douri, 1945, p. 14; Taqoush, 2011, pp. 172-173]. Al-Mas'udi [1983, Vol. 1, p. 313] clarified al-Mutawakkil's stance towards the Turks by quoting him as saying: "The Turks' oppression has reached its limit; expel them, lower their ranks, and exercise tyranny and dominance over them."

This behavior was part of a series of measures taken by Caliph al-Mutawakkil to strengthen the Arab front against the Turkish front, aiming to save himself and the caliphate from the dominance of Turkish leaders [Al-Douri, 1945, p. 14; Taqoush, 2011, pp. 172-173; Fawzi, n.d., p. 360].

Caliph al-Mutawakkil took measures to bring religious scholars and hadith experts closer to him, putting an end to the challenges related to the creation of the Quran and eliminating the ideology of the Mu'tazilites. He aimed to protect the achieved centralization by creating a new military class to stand by his side, granting this class land [Ali, "Studies in the History of Iqta' in Islamic Ages," Published Research in the Journal of Arab Scientific Heritage, College of Education for Girls, University of Baghdad, No. 4, 2015, p. 14]. Trying to distance himself from the influence of the Samarra troops, al-Mutawakkil took a bold step. Abu al-Fadl [n.d., Vol. 2, p. 40], referring to events in the year 243 AH/857 AD, mentioned that al-Mutawakkil traveled to Damascus due to its virtues and pleasant environment. After entering the city, he attempted to transfer state institutions there to establish it as the new capital. However, his stay in Damascus was short-lived, and he returned to Samarra in the year 244 AH/858 AD. Abu al-Fadl [n.d., Vol. 2, p. 40], discussing events in the year 244 AH/858 AD, mentioned al-Mutawakkil's reason for returning to Samarra, stating, "Because Damascus experienced water shortage, he returned to Samarra, where he stayed for two months and some days." This indicates the significant attention given to providing and achieving the required environment for cities.

Sadeq, Abdel Karim Azzaldin, in his research article titled "The Environment and Society in the Abbasid Era: A Historical Ecological Study," published in the Journal of the College of Education for Girls, University of Baghdad, History Department, Volume 29, Issue 4, 2018, page 2796, sheds light on the historical ecological aspects of the Abbasid era.

In reality, al-Mutawakkil's return to Samarra was influenced by the pressures exerted by the Turkish leaders and their arbitrary practices towards him, leading to chaos and uprisings. This compelled Caliph al-Mutawakkil to respond to their demands to return [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 210; Ibn Miskawayh, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 305; Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol. 6, p. 160; Al-Nuwayri, 2002, Vol. 22, p. 291; Ibn Kathir, 1997, Vol. 14, p. 437].

It appears that their insistence on his return was driven by their fear of the caliph settling in the Levant, jeopardizing their legitimacy and fearing Arab support in the region. Their interests dictated that al-Mutawakkil's return was essential to keep him under their watchful eyes. His return only increased their influence and control [Al-Douri, 1945, p. 14; Taqoush, 2011, p. 173].

Second Axis: Motives Behind the Assassination of Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (247 AH/861 AD)

Abu al-Fadl did not specifically mention the reasons that led the Turks to assassinate Caliph al-Mutawakkil. However, by examining historical sources such as Al-Tabari [1967, Vol. 9, p. 210], Ibn Miskawayh [2002, Vol. 4, p. 305], Ibn al-Athir [1997, Vol. 6, p. 160], Al-Nuwayri [2002, Vol. 22, p. 291], and Ibn Kathir [1997, Vol. 14, p. 437], two motives are evident and widely agreed upon.

Firstly, the Turks were motivated by their arbitrary policies towards Caliph al-Mutawakkil, especially under the leadership of Bugha al-Sharabi. They perceived the caliph's intentions and the threat he posed to their influence and authority, particularly after he ordered the inclusion of the Sawad and the summer pasture into his dominion. Bugha al-Sharabi, along with others, seized Isfahan and the mountainous regions [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 222; Ibn Miskawayh, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 308; Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992, Vol. 10, p. 356; Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 15, p. 217; Ibn Taghribirdi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 157]. The decision to annex these territories and the dismissal of their minister, al-Fath ibn Khaqan, seemed to be the spark that ignited the conflict between the caliph and the Turks.

The other motive behind the assassination of Caliph al-Mutawakkil was the involvement of al-Muntasir, the son of al-Mutawakkil, in an agreement with the Turkish leaders to kill his father [Abu al-Fadl, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 41; Al-Nuwayri, 2002, Vol. 22, p. 294; Al-Diyar al-Bakri, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 338].

Several indications suggest that al-Muntasir played a role in the 'Turks' killing of his father or was at least aware of their plans to assassinate him without taking any action to prevent them. This could be attributed to the strained relationship between al-Muntasir and his father, Caliph al-Mutawakkil, who was planning to remove al-Muntasir from the position of crown prince [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 225; Ibn Miskawayh, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 308; Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 15, p. 277; Ibn Taghribirdi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 157].

Al-Muntasir's reaction to his father was a refusal to relinquish the position of crown prince to his brother al-Mu'taz, considering himself more entitled to the caliphate due to being older [Al-

Diyar al-Bakri, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 339]. This constant defiance angered his father, and Caliph al-Mutawakkil escalated his arbitrary treatment of al-Muntasir. He would bring him before public assemblies to degrade, insult, threaten, and intimidate him. The situation worsened when the caliph ordered his minister al-Fath ibn Khaqan to punish al-Muntasir, Bugha, and Waseef Ghaila [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 225; Ibn Miskawayh, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 308; Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 15, p. 277].

The tense relationship between the caliph and his son, al-Muntasir, can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, al-Mutawakkil favored his son al-Mu'taz more due to his love and passion for his mother, Qubayba. Consequently, he intended to transfer the succession to him, leading to a disagreement between him and al-Muntasir [Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 15, p. 277; al-Suyuti, 2004, p. 255].

Moreover, certain close associates of Caliph al-Mutawakkil played a significant role in deepening the rift between the caliph and al-Muntasir. This included his minister, al-Fath ibn Khakan, who had a bias towards al-Mu'taz. Al-Tabari [1967, Vol. 9, p. 223] reported that al-Fath ibn Khakan hinted to Caliph al-Mutawakkil during the last Friday of Ramadan in the year 247 AH (861 CE) to delegate the leadership of prayer to al-Mu'taz, which angered al-Muntasir. Caliph al-Mutawakkil had also requested al-Fath ibn Khakan to slap al-Muntasir twice on his nape. Subsequently, in a council, al-Mutawakkil declared, "Bear witness, all of you, that I have dismissed the one in a hurry, meaning al-Muntasir." He then turned to him and said, "I named you al-Muntasir, and people named you the 'awaited' due to your foolishness, but now you have become the 'hasty.'" Al-Muntasir replied, "If you ordered my execution, it would be easier for me than what you have done to me" [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 226; Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol. 6, p. 773; Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992, Vol. 11, p. 356; Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 15, p. 218].

Furthermore, it should be added that al-Muntasir had a deep affection for the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) and consistently opposed his father's mistreatment towards them [Abu al-Fida, n.d., Vol. 2, pp. 38–40]. On a particular occasion, he became upset with his father when he overheard one of the remorseful associates of al-Mutawakkil disparaging Imam Ali (peace be upon him). Al-Muntasir confronted him, saying, "O Commander of the Faithful, this slanderous individual, the eunuch servant of al-Mutawakkil, who people laugh at, is none other than your cousin and an elder from your household. He is your pride, so eat his flesh if you wish, but do not feed this dog and others like him!" Al-Mutawakkil then instructed the musicians to sing, "The youth is jealous for his cousin... the youth's head is in the heat of his mother" [Abu al-Fida, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 38; al-Amili, 2004, p. 7].

Moreover, al-Mutawakkil harbored animosity towards his extended relatives among the Alawites. Al-Tusi [1993, p. 328] specifically highlighted instances where al-Mutawakkil demonstrated hostility towards the symbols of the Alawi household.

It appears that these reasons were sufficient for al-Muntasir to justify the assistance of Turkish commanders in the killing of his father, as long as both parties shared the common goal of getting rid of al-Mutawakkil. Historical sources corroborate this perspective [Abu al-Fida, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 41; also see: al-Tabari, 1967, Vol. 9, p. 222; Ibn Masawaih, 2002, Vol. 4, p. 308; Ibn al-Jawzi, 1992, Vol. 10, p. 356; Subt Ibn al-Jawzi, 2013, Vol. 15, p. 217; Ibn al-Taftaqi Bardī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 157; Ibn Kathir, 1997, Vol. 14, p. 456]. Historical accounts suggest that al-Muntasir reached an agreement with the Turkish commanders to assassinate his father and was well aware of the unfolding events. Ibn Kathir mentioned, "Al-Muntasir was pledged allegiance to in the night when his father was killed; it was a private allegiance from the Turkish

commanders, and in the morning, the public allegiance was taken for him" [1997, Vol. 14, p. 456]. However, some indications suggest that the Turks were the planners and executors of al-Mutawakkil's murder, relieving al-Muntasir of the accusation.

Considering that al-Muntasir was characterized as a strong and just individual with a desire for goodness and minimal cruelty [Ibn Taqtaqi Bardī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 159; al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, Vol. 9, p. 446], it seems unreasonable for someone with such qualities to dare to kill his father, especially when such a crime had no precedent in the Abbasid household.

After the assassination of his father, al-Muntasir harbored intense resentment towards the Turks, openly declaring his intent to kill them for the sake of his father. He referred to them as the "killers of the caliphs" [Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol. 6, p. 187; al-Nuwayri, 2002, Vol. 22, p. 300; al-Dhahabi, 2006, Vol. 9, p. 449; al-Kutubi, 1974, Vol. 3, p. 318; Ibn Taqtaqi Bardī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 159; al-Dīyārbakrī, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 339]. If al-Muntasir had been involved in these killings, the Turks would not have remained silent about it, and they would have attributed the act to him. On the contrary, they took responsibility for al-Mutawakkil's murder and claimed revenge for the actions taken against them. As mentioned by al-Mas'udi [1973, Vol. 4, p. 23]: "They [the Turks] sought revenge against al-Mutawakkil for killing Itakh and confiscating wealth and livestock. The Turks saw it fit to kill al-Mutawakkil in Damascus."

It seems that this might not have been the first attempt to assassinate Caliph al-Mutawakkil, as the intention was longstanding, waiting for the opportune moment. The open hostility between al-Muntasir and the Turkish commanders led some historians [Ibn Taqtaqi Bardī, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 159; al-Dīyārbakrī, n.d., Vol. 2, p. 318] to cast doubt on al-Muntasir's direct involvement in his father's killing.

Through the study and analysis of historical texts, it becomes evident that al-Muntasir did not explicitly reach an agreement with the Turks, as there are no details about such an agreement in any historical text. However, it seems that he was aware of the unfolding events and could have defended his father, but chose not to do so. This justifies his statement to his mother at the moment of his father's death: "I rushed and was rushed" [al-Dhahabi, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 356; al-Yafī'i, 1962, Vol. 2, p. 115].

There is a significant possibility that historians of that historical period refrained from vindicating al-Muntasir and placing full blame on the Turks due to fear of repercussions. The caliphs lived in a climate of fear and anxiety, and the people also lived in constant fear and caution. This atmosphere of intimidation had a profound impact, as writers no longer possessed liberated pens or courageous souls. Writers leaned towards caution and fear [al-Dinawari, 1992, Introduction by the editor, p. 2].

The Third Axis: Execution of the Assassination Operation against Caliph Al-Mutawakkil (247 AH / 861 CE)

The existing discord between Caliph al-Mutawakkil and his son al-Muntasir al-Majali paved the way for Turkish leaders to betray and conspire against him. This ultimately led to the downfall and assassination of Caliph al-Mutawakkil. The sources recount that the Turkish leaders found an opportune moment to carry out their plan, leading to the assassination of the vengeful Caliph on the third night of Shawwal in the year 247 AH (861 CE). [Al-Yaqoubi, without year, Vol. 2, p. 457]. The vengeful Turks seized the favorable opportunity to kill him [Abu al-Fida,

without year, Vol. 2, p. 41; also see Al-Nuwayri, 2002, Vol. 22, p. 214; Al-Diyar Bakri, without year, Vol. 2, p. 339]. They collectively attacked him with swords during his private moment in his drinking assembly, and along with him, his minister, al-Fath ibn Khaghan, was also killed [Abu al-Fida, without year, Vol. 2, p. 41].

It is essential to delve into the historical details of the events that tarnished the status of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, subjecting him to severe oppression, as he was mistreated, removed from his position, and subjected to a harsh fate, all in service to the interests of the Turks and those aligned with them.

At the outset, it is essential to distinguish between two conflicting fronts, one being civilian in support of the caliphate represented by its minister Al-Fath bin Khakan and the scholars. This civil front faces a military bloc led by Al-Muntasir and Turkish commanders [Fawzi, No.T, p.363]. Al-Mutawakkil did not spare any effort to win over the Turks, including Al-Muntasir, to his side [Al-Mas'udi, 19, No.T, Vol.4, p.99]. We observe that he began to draw closer to the Turks after his aspirations aligned with theirs. Following the inclusion of Utamish, a despised figure by Al-Mutawakkil due to his proximity to Al-Muntasir, Utamish sought to attract the hearts of the Turks towards Al-Muntasir. Conversely, Al-Fath bin Khakan intensified the caliph's aversion towards his son Al-Muntasir. When the Turks decided to assassinate Caliph Al-Mutawakkil, they sent Baga the Younger to Bahr, intending to test Bahr's loyalty in obedience. Baga the Younger requested him to kill a page. Upon seeing the page, Bahr agreed and demonstrated obedience. Baga said, "I do not want to kill a page; rather, kill Al-Muntasir." When Bahr heard this, he lowered his head and said to Baga the Younger, "If we kill him and his father is alive, his father will retaliate against you."

Baga the Younger asked him, "What do you think?" Bahr replied, "Let's start with the father first and kill him." Baga then said to him, "Woe to you! Are you serious?" Bahr responded, "I am serious, or else kill me with your sword and say he intended to kill his master" [Al-Mas'udi, 1973, Vol.4, p.99; Al-Dhahabi, 1993, Vol.18, p.2000]. The plan was set in motion for Bahr to assassinate Al-Mutawakkil, and a group of loyalists were prepared for this purpose. On that night, Al-Muntasir was present in the council, and he left, taking with him the chamberlain Zuraafa. He said to Zuraafa, "The Commander of the Faithful has not slept yet." Al-Muntasir added, "He has taken some wine from him." They walked to a room and discussed the marriage of Utamish's son to Zuraafa's daughter, sharing a meal [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol.9, p.226; Ibn Masawaih, 2002, Vol.4, p.309; Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol.6, p.173]. Only Al-Fath bin Khakan and four of his entourage remained with Al-Mutawakkil [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol.9, p.226; Ibn Masawaih, 2002, Vol.4, p.310; Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol.6, p.173], as Baga al-Sharabi ordered the singers to leave, causing displeasure to Al-Fath bin Khakan, who said to him, "This is not the time for them to leave."

Baga then said, "The Commander of the Faithful ordered me that if he exceeds seven ratls (a measure of weight), I should not leave anyone in the council. He has now exceeded ten ratls" [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol.9, p.226; Ibn Masawaih, 2002, Vol.4, p.310; Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol.6, p.173]. All the doors were closed except for the Tigris gate through which the Turks entered, and they confiscated the wine [Al-Tabari, 1967, Vol.9, p.226; Ibn al-Athir, 1997, Vol.6, p.173].

Al-Mas'udi reported [1973, Vol.4, p.98] the account of Buhtri, who witnessed the harsh treatment towards Caliph Al-Mutawakkil. Buhtri said, "Ten Turks, masked and brandishing swords, entered, and Baga, along with another, ascended to the bed of Al-Mutawakkil. They struck him, and Al-Fath bin Khakan exclaimed, 'Woe to you! This is your master.' Only Al-

Fath bin Khakan remained in the council, fighting them. He threw himself over Al-Mutawakkil, but they overpowered him, killed him, and dismembered him."

It seems that the killing of Al-Fath bin Khakan was not solely due to his defense of Caliph Al-Mutawakkil but also because of the animosity harbored by the Turkish leaders towards him. He consistently challenged the authority of the Turks. It appears that each caliph had his own minister, and when a caliph perished, the era of his minister also came to an end [Alwan Ali Farhoun, "The Most Important Ministers of the Abbasid State Until the End of Mamun's Era" (Research published in the Journal of Education for Girls, University of Wasit - College of Basic Education, Vol. 28, No. 5, 2017, p.1503)]. It is worth noting that Al-Fath bin Khakan was aware of the Turkish plot through the collaboration of some Turkish slave girls. However, he kept it a secret due to the joy he observed in Al-Mutawakkil. He wanted to spoil their plans and disgrace them in front of the people because he was confident that they wouldn't dare to act on it, given the trust they had placed in him, believing that such an act was beyond his courage and capability [Ibn Masawaih, 2002, Vol.4, p.311; Al-Tayyib b. Mukharramah, 2008, Vol.2, p.541].

The assassination of Al-Mutawakkil marked the first political conspiracy plotted to kill an Abbasid caliph, and no previous caliph had been killed in such a manner [Al-Duri, 1945, p.19; Taqoush, 2011, p.172; Fawzi, No.T, p.361]. This, in itself, represents a political injustice to the authority of the Abbasid caliphate by marginalizing the role of the caliph and exaggerating the role of the Turkish leaders. Their practice of arbitrary policies towards anyone opposing their interests and desires was met with the fate of assassination.

The Abbasid caliphate experienced a state of weakness and division due to the succession of weak and powerless caliphs who worked to sideline Arabs and other elements, favoring the Turkish element in the army and positions of power [Abduljabbar, Omar Falah, "The Influence of the Turks on the Abbasid Caliphs and Its Impact on the Rise of Independent Emirates" (Research published in the Journal of Studies in History and Heritage, University of Iraq, College of Arts, Department of History, No. 68, p.311)]. The Turks seized control of the Abbasid caliphate, marking the beginning of a new era where the Turks prevailed and took control of affairs. The Abbasid caliphs became subject to their influence [Al-Duri, 1945, p.19; Taqoush, 2011, p.172; Fawzi, No.T, p.361].

Conclusion

Upon completing this research, the arbitrary practices suffered by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil at the hands of Turkish leaders became apparent, along with their conspiracy against him to terminate his life and caliphate. This research also explores the reasons and motivations behind their actions, leading to the appointment of his son al-Muntasir as his successor.

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