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A Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System Model: Design, Implementation, and Implications for Islamic Financial Practices

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Abstract

This study aims to develop a Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System (SCDAIS) model that integrates digital accounting technologies with Islamic accounting principles, Sharia governance, and ethical objectives. Using a qualitative approach grounded in the interpretive paradigm, the research adopts a multi-sited ethnographic orientation to explore how digital accounting systems are conceptualized and practiced across Islamic financial institutions, including Islamic banks, fintech platforms, zakat and waqf institutions, and regulatory environments. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with 12–15 key informants, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis guided by thick description. The findings reveal that digital accounting systems in Islamic contexts operate as socio-technical and socio-religious constructs shaped by institutional values, technological capabilities, and interpretations of Sharia principles. Five core dimensions of SCDAIS were identified: digital infrastructure, accounting system core, Sharia compliance mechanisms, governance structures, and maqasid al-shariah-oriented outcomes. The study highlights that digital technologies are inherently value-neutral and require intentional embedding of Sharia principles within system architecture to ensure compliance. Furthermore, human interpretation remains essential in addressing complex financial practices that cannot be fully automated. The proposed SCDAIS model contributes to the literature by offering an integrative framework that bridges technology, accounting, and Islamic ethics. Practically, the findings provide guidance for developing ethical, transparent, and accountable digital accounting systems that support sustainable Islamic financial practices in the digital economy.

INTRODUCTION

The acceleration of digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped the architecture of contemporary financial systems, including accounting information systems (AIS). Advances in cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, big data analytics, and financial technology (FinTech) have significantly transformed how financial information is recorded, processed, verified, and reported (Hasan & Ali, 2022; Khan & Rabbani, 2023; Yusof & Bahlous, 2024). Organizations are increasingly adopting digital accounting systems to improve operational efficiency, data accuracy, transparency, and real-time decision-making (Sarea & Hanefah, 2022; Al-Okaily et al., 2023). In the financial sector, digital accounting systems have evolved from simple transaction-recording tools into strategic platforms that support governance, risk management, compliance, and stakeholder accountability (Ullah et al., 2021; Rahman & Shahid, 2021).

This transformation is particularly significant within Islamic financial institutions, which operate under dual obligations: achieving operational efficiency while maintaining strict adherence to Sharia principles (AAOIFI, 2022; Hidayat et al., 2023). The rapid expansion of Islamic finance

globally has intensified the need for innovative digital solutions capable of supporting increasingly complex financial transactions (IFSB, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Islamic banking, takaful, Islamic capital markets, zakat management, waqf institutions, and Sharia-compliant fintech platforms are experiencing substantial growth in response to increasing demand for ethical and faith-based financial services (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2022; Saiti et al., 2023). Simultaneously, customers expect seamless digital experiences, instant transactions, transparent reporting, and secure financial services comparable to those offered by conventional financial institutions (Lee & Shin, 2021; Arner et al., 2022). Consequently, Islamic financial institutions face mounting pressure to modernize their accounting and information systems while ensuring that technological innovation remains aligned with Islamic ethical values and regulatory requirements (Hassan et al., 2022; Omar & Dinar, 2024).

Digital transformation presents significant opportunities for Islamic finance. Emerging technologies facilitate faster transaction processing, enhanced transparency, improved auditability, automated compliance monitoring, and broader financial inclusion (Zetzsche et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2023). Blockchain-based systems, smart contracts, artificial intelligence, and digital governance frameworks offer the potential to strengthen accountability and reduce information asymmetry in financial reporting (Yusof & Bahlous, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023). These technologies are particularly relevant to Islamic finance because transparency, trustworthiness (*amanah*), justice (*adl*), and accountability constitute fundamental principles within the Islamic economic framework (Chapra, 2022; Kamla & Alsoufi, 2023). Despite these opportunities, the integration of digital technologies into Islamic accounting systems remains challenging. Existing accounting information systems were primarily designed based on conventional accounting paradigms that focus on profit maximization, shareholder value, and compliance with conventional accounting standards (Sarea & Hanefah, 2022; Alsharari, 2022). Although these systems provide technical efficiency, they may not adequately accommodate specific requirements of Islamic financial reporting, such as the prohibition of *riba*, *gharar*, and *maysir*, as well as the reporting obligations associated with zakat, waqf, and profit-sharing contracts (AAOIFI, 2022; Haneef & Furqani, 2021).

Recent studies indicate that digital transformation within Islamic financial institutions remains uneven and fragmented. While customer-facing digital services such as mobile banking and fintech applications have advanced significantly, the implementation of digital technologies within core accounting functions and Sharia governance processes remains limited (Khan et al., 2022; Rahman et al., 2023). This gap creates challenges related to transparency, audit quality, governance effectiveness, and regulatory compliance (Otoritas Jasa Keuangan, 2023; IFSB, 2023). From a broader perspective, accounting information systems within Islamic financial institutions serve not only as operational tools but also as mechanisms of accountability to multiple stakeholders, including investors, regulators, Sharia supervisory boards, and society (Kamla & Alsoufi, 2023; Ullah et al., 2021). Islamic accounting extends beyond financial performance to encompass moral, social, and religious responsibilities aligned with *maqasid al-shariah* (Chapra, 2022; Haneef & Furqani, 2021). Therefore, AIS must facilitate both financial accountability and Sharia accountability simultaneously.

The emergence of Islamic fintech further intensifies the need for advanced digital accounting systems. Platforms offering peer-to-peer financing, crowdfunding, digital investment, and electronic zakat collection generate large volumes of financial data requiring robust, transparent, and compliant accounting infrastructures (Arner et al., 2022; Saiti et al., 2023). However, these developments also introduce new challenges, including cybersecurity risks, algorithmic accountability, and automated Sharia compliance verification (Nguyen et al., 2023; Omar & Dinar, 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, existing literature remains fragmented, often examining digital transformation, Islamic accounting, and governance separately. There is limited research that integrates these domains into a unified conceptual framework (Al-Okaily et al., 2023; Hassan

et al., 2022). Consequently, a significant gap exists in understanding how a Sharia-compliant digital accounting information system should be systematically designed, implemented, and evaluated.

In response to this gap, this study aims to develop a comprehensive SCDAIS model that integrates digital technologies, Islamic accounting principles, Sharia governance, and ethical accountability. The study contributes to both theory and practice by offering a holistic framework to guide policymakers, financial institutions, and system developers in building future-ready accounting systems aligned with Islamic values. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the essential components of a Sharia-compliant digital accounting information system? (2) How can digital technologies be integrated with Islamic accounting principles and governance frameworks? and (3) What are the implications of implementing such systems for transparency, accountability, and sustainable Islamic financial practices?

METHODS

2.1 Research Paradigm and Approach

This study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which assumes that social reality is constructed through meanings, values, and interactions shaped by human experiences within specific socio-cultural and institutional contexts. In contrast to positivist approaches that seek objective and generalizable laws, the interpretive paradigm emphasizes understanding subjective meanings, particularly in complex systems where technology, ethics, and religion intersect. Within this paradigm, the study adopts a qualitative approach with a multi-sited ethnographic orientation, aiming to explore deeply how digital accounting information systems are conceptualized, understood, and practiced within Islamic financial contexts. Ethnography is particularly appropriate because it allows the researcher to capture the lived experiences (*emic perspective*) of actors involved in Islamic financial practices, including how they interpret Sharia compliance within digital systems.

This approach is inspired by the ethnographic tradition introduced by Bronislaw Malinowski and further developed in qualitative research by Clifford Geertz, particularly through the concept of "thick description," which emphasizes rich, contextualized interpretation of social practices. In the context of this study, the approach enables an in-depth understanding of how accounting systems are not merely technical tools, but socio-religious constructs embedded with Islamic values such as *amanah* (trust), *adl* (justice), and *maqasid al-shariah*.

2.2 Research Site and Context

The research was conducted in multiple purposively selected sites representing diverse Islamic financial ecosystems where digital accounting practices are actively evolving. These sites include:

1. Islamic banking institutions implementing digital accounting systems;
2. Islamic fintech platforms facilitating digital financial transactions;
3. Zakat and waqf management institutions utilizing digital reporting systems;
4. Academic and regulatory environments involved in developing Islamic accounting frameworks.

The selection of multiple sites reflects a multi-contextual strategy, allowing the researcher to capture variations in practices across institutional settings. These sites represent both formal financial institutions and emerging digital platforms, thereby providing a comprehensive view of the phenomenon. The study was conducted over a prolonged engagement period of 6–12 months, enabling the researcher to build trust with participants, observe system implementation processes, and capture dynamic interactions within digital accounting environments.

3.3 Informants and Participant Selection

Informants were selected using purposive and theoretical sampling, focusing on individuals who possess deep knowledge and direct involvement in digital accounting systems within Islamic financial institutions. A total of 12–15 key informants were involved, consisting of:

1. Islamic financial practitioners (accountants, auditors, and system users);
2. IT developers involved in AIS and fintech systems;
3. Members of Sharia Supervisory Boards (SSB);
4. Regulators and policy makers;
5. Academics specializing in Islamic accounting and fintech.

The selection aimed to ensure data richness and diversity of perspectives, enabling a holistic understanding of the SCDAIS phenomenon from technical, religious, and governance dimensions.

2.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three primary qualitative techniques:

1. Participant Observation

The researcher conducted active and passive observations within institutional environments where digital accounting systems are implemented. Observations focused on:

1. System usage and workflow processes;
2. Interaction between users and digital platforms;
3. Integration of Sharia compliance mechanisms;
4. Decision-making processes involving accounting information.

Field notes were systematically recorded to capture both explicit practices and implicit cultural meanings.

2. In-Depth Interviews

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. The interview protocol remained flexible, allowing emerging themes to be explored further. Key areas explored include:

1. Understanding of Sharia-compliant accounting systems;
2. Challenges in integrating digital technology with Islamic principles;
3. Perceptions of transparency, accountability, and trust;
4. Institutional practices in ensuring compliance.

Each interview lasted approximately 45–90 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3. Document Analysis

The study also analyzed relevant documents, including:

1. Digital financial reports;
2. System documentation and architecture;
3. Sharia compliance guidelines;
4. Regulatory frameworks;
5. Internal audit reports.

These documents served as artifact-based evidence reflecting how accounting systems are structured and implemented in practice.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach guided by the principles of thick description (Geertz, 1973). The analysis involved several iterative stages:

1. Data Transcription and Familiarization
   All interview recordings and field notes were transcribed and repeatedly reviewed to gain a holistic understanding.

2. Open Coding
   Initial codes were generated to identify significant concepts related to digital systems, Sharia compliance, governance, and accounting practices.
3. Axial Coding
   Codes were grouped into categories reflecting relationships among concepts, such as:
   - Digital infrastructure
   - Accounting processes
   - Sharia compliance mechanisms
   - Governance structures
   - Ethical values
4. Selective Coding and Theme Development
   Core themes were identified and integrated into broader conceptual dimensions forming the SCDAIS model.
5. Interpretation (Thick Description)
   The researcher developed analytical narratives that connect empirical findings with theoretical constructs, emphasizing meaning, context, and interpretation rather than mere description.
6. Model Construction
   The final stage involved synthesizing all themes into a coherent conceptual model of a Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Research Rigor

To ensure the quality and rigor of the study, several validation strategies were employed:

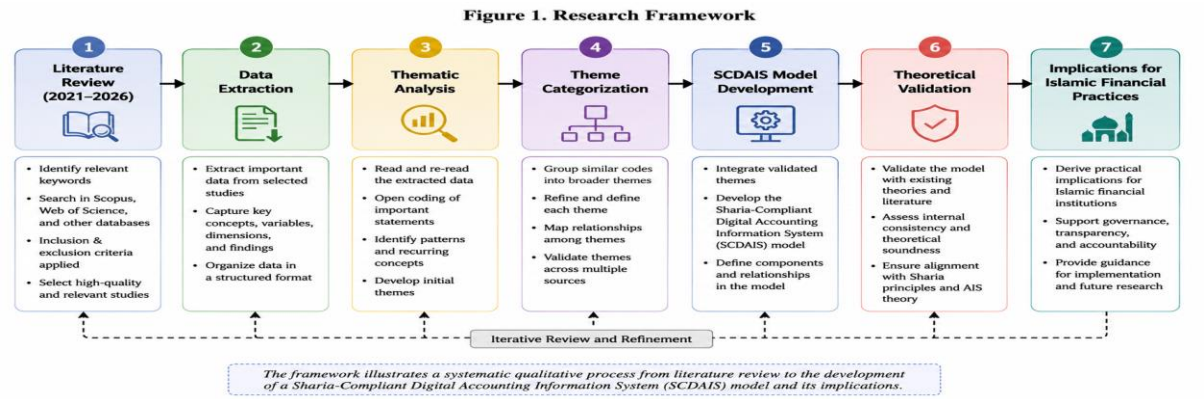
1. Credibility: Achieved through prolonged engagement, triangulation (interviews, observations, documents), and member checking with key informants.
2. Transferability: Ensured by providing rich contextual descriptions, allowing applicability in similar Islamic financial settings.
3. Dependability: Maintained through a transparent research process and systematic documentation of all procedures.
4. Confirmability: Ensed by grounding findings in empirical data and minimizing researcher bias.

Additionally, peer debriefing was conducted with experts in Islamic accounting and qualitative research to enhance analytical rigor.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to strict ethical standards. All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information. The researcher also maintained reflexivity to minimize bias and ensure respectful engagement with participants, particularly in contexts involving religious values and institutional sensitivity.

Figure 1. Research Framework



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Overview of Empirical Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of digital accounting information systems within Islamic financial institutions is not merely a technical transformation but represents a multi-layered socio-technical and socio-religious phenomenon. Through multi-sited ethnographic engagement, the study identifies that digital accounting systems are interpreted, negotiated, and practiced differently across institutional settings, depending on organizational culture, technological capacity, and the depth of Sharia understanding. Across all research sites—Islamic banking institutions, fintech platforms, zakat and waqf organizations, and regulatory environments—there is a shared recognition that digital accounting systems play a strategic role in enhancing efficiency and transparency. However, the meaning of "Sharia compliance" within these systems varies significantly, reflecting differences in epistemological orientation and institutional priorities. Thematic analysis resulted in the identification of five core dimensions forming the Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System (SCDAIS), namely: (1) Digital Infrastructure, (2) Accounting System Core, (3) Sharia Compliance Mechanisms, (4) Governance Structure, and (5) Ethical-Outcome Orientation (Maqasid al-Shariah). These dimensions are not isolated but dynamically interconnected, forming a holistic system embedded in both technological and ethical frameworks.

3.2 Digital Infrastructure as an Enabling but Neutral Layer

The first theme emerging from the analysis is the role of digital infrastructure as a foundational yet value-neutral component. Informants consistently emphasized that technologies such as cloud-based systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP), blockchain prototypes, and AI-assisted analytics are increasingly adopted to improve accounting processes. However, ethnographic observations reveal that technology itself is perceived as "ethically neutral", meaning that its compliance with Sharia depends entirely on how it is designed and used. One IT developer noted:

> "The system can process transactions very efficiently, but it does not automatically understand whether a transaction is halal or not. That depends on the rules embedded in the system."
>
> This finding highlights a critical insight: digitalization alone does not guarantee Sharia compliance. Instead, compliance must be intentionally embedded within system architecture through rules, filters, and governance mechanisms.

Furthermore, disparities were observed between institutions. Islamic banks tend to have more structured and integrated digital systems, while zakat and waqf institutions often rely on semi-digital or hybrid systems. Islamic fintech platforms, on the other hand, exhibit high technological agility but face challenges in standardizing compliance protocols.

4.3 Accounting System Core: Between Automation and Interpretation

The second theme relates to the core accounting system, which includes transaction processing, financial reporting, and internal control mechanisms. The findings indicate that most institutions have successfully digitized basic accounting functions, such as journal entries, ledger management, and financial reporting.

However, a deeper analysis reveals a tension between automation and interpretive judgment. While digital systems enable real-time data processing and standardized reporting, certain Islamic financial transactions—such as profit-sharing contracts (mudharabah and musyarakah), zakat calculations, and waqf reporting—require contextual interpretation that cannot be fully automated. For example, accountants in Islamic banks reported that:

- Profit-sharing calculations often require adjustments based on contextual agreements;
- Zakat obligations depend on interpretations of nisab and haul;
- Classification of transactions may require ethical judgment beyond system rules.

This indicates that human agency remains central within digital accounting systems, particularly in ensuring that financial practices align with Islamic principles. The system supports decision-making but does not replace the interpretive role of accountants and Sharia supervisors.

3.4 Sharia Compliance Mechanisms: From Symbolic to Embedded Practices

One of the most critical findings of this study is the variation in how Sharia compliance is operationalized within digital accounting systems. The analysis identifies three levels of compliance:

1. Symbolic Compliance

At this level, institutions claim Sharia compliance primarily through labeling and institutional identity, without embedding compliance mechanisms into the system itself. Digital systems remain largely conventional, with minimal adjustments.

2. Procedural Compliance

At this stage, compliance is ensured through manual checks, audits, and external supervision. Sharia Supervisory Boards (SSB) review reports periodically, but compliance is not automated within the system.

3. Embedded Compliance

The most advanced level involves integrating Sharia rules directly into the system. This includes:

1. Automated filtering of non-compliant transactions;
2. Smart classification of contracts;
3. Built-in zakat calculation modules;
4. Real-time compliance monitoring dashboards.

Only a limited number of institutions, particularly advanced fintech platforms, have begun implementing this level of integration.

This finding demonstrates that true Sharia compliance in digital accounting requires system-level integration, not merely external oversight.

3.5 Governance Structures: Bridging Technology and Sharia Authority

The fourth theme highlights the importance of governance structures in ensuring the effectiveness of SCDAIS. The study finds that governance is not limited to technical control but involves a complex interaction between:

1. Management;
2. IT developers;
3. Accountants;
4. Sharia Supervisory Boards;
5. Regulators.

Ethnographic insights reveal that communication gaps often exist between these actors. For instance, IT developers may lack sufficient understanding of Sharia principles, while Sharia scholars may not fully comprehend system architecture. This creates a "translation gap" between religious principles and technological implementation. One Sharia board member stated:

> "We understand the principles, but we rely on the technical team to implement them. Sometimes what we intend is not exactly what appears in the system."

This gap can lead to inconsistencies between intended and actual compliance. Therefore, effective SCDAIS requires interdisciplinary collaboration, where technological and religious expertise are integrated.

Additionally, regulatory frameworks play a crucial role in standardizing practices. However, the findings indicate that regulations often lag behind technological developments, creating uncertainty in implementation.

3.6 Ethical Outcomes and Maqasid al-Shariah Orientation

Beyond technical and procedural aspects, the study identifies a deeper dimension: the ethical outcomes of digital accounting systems. Informants consistently emphasized that the ultimate goal of Islamic accounting is not merely compliance but achieving broader objectives aligned with maqasid al-shariah, including:

1. Transparency (shafafiyah);
2. Accountability (hisab);
3. Justice (adl);
4. Social welfare (maslahah).

Digital systems are seen as tools that can either enhance or undermine these objectives. For example:

1. Real-time reporting increases transparency;
2. Automated audit trails improve accountability;
3. Data analytics can support fair decision-making;
4. Digital platforms expand financial inclusion.

However, risks were also identified, including:

1. Over-reliance on automation;
2. Data manipulation;
3. Cybersecurity threats;
4. Ethical detachment due to system-driven processes.

This suggests that technology must be guided by ethical frameworks, not merely efficiency considerations.

3.7 The SCDAIS Model: An Integrated Conceptual Framework

Based on the synthesis of findings, this study develops a Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System (SCDAIS) model consisting of five integrated layers:

1. Digital Infrastructure Layer. Provides technological capabilities but remains value-neutral.
2. Accounting System Core Layer Processes financial data and supports reporting functions.
3. Sharia Compliance Layer Embeds Islamic rules and principles into system operations.
4. Governance Layer Ensures coordination among stakeholders and regulatory compliance.
5. Ethical Outcome Layer (Maqasid al-Shariah) Represents the ultimate objectives guiding the system.

The model illustrates that Sharia compliance is not an isolated feature but an integrative process spanning all system components.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore and develop a Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System (SCDAIS) through a qualitative, interpretive, and multi-sited ethnographic approach. The findings demonstrate that the transformation of accounting information systems within Islamic financial institutions is not merely a technological shift, but a deeply embedded socio-technical and socio-religious process shaped by values, institutional practices, and interpretations of Sharia principles. The study reveals that digital accounting systems in Islamic contexts operate across multiple interconnected dimensions, namely digital infrastructure, accounting system core, Sharia compliance mechanisms, governance structures, and maqasid al-shariah-oriented outcomes. These dimensions collectively form a holistic system in which technology, accounting practices, and ethical values are inseparable. Importantly, the findings highlight that digital technologies themselves are inherently neutral; their alignment with Islamic

principles depends on how they are designed, governed, and implemented within institutional frameworks.

A key conclusion of this research is that Sharia compliance cannot be achieved solely through symbolic or procedural mechanisms, but requires deep integration within the architecture of digital accounting systems. Institutions that embed Sharia principles directly into system logic—through automated compliance checks, contract classification, and real-time monitoring—demonstrate a higher level of alignment with Islamic financial objectives. However, such practices remain limited, indicating a significant gap between technological capability and ethical implementation. Furthermore, the study underscores the continued importance of human interpretation and ethical judgment in digital accounting environments. Despite advancements in automation and artificial intelligence, critical aspects of Islamic financial practices—such as profit-sharing arrangements, zakat calculation, and ethical classification of transactions—require contextual understanding that cannot be fully codified into algorithms. This finding reinforces the notion that SCDAIS should be designed as a human-centered system, where technology supports rather than replaces professional and religious judgment.

Another important insight concerns the role of governance and interdisciplinary collaboration. The effectiveness of SCDAIS depends on the ability of institutions to bridge gaps between technical experts, accounting professionals, and Sharia authorities. The study identifies a persistent "translation gap" between these actors, which can hinder the accurate implementation of Sharia principles within digital systems. Therefore, strengthening collaboration and developing shared understanding across disciplines is essential for achieving effective system integration. From an ethical perspective, the study confirms that the ultimate purpose of SCDAIS extends beyond efficiency and compliance toward achieving the broader objectives **of** maqasid al-shariah, including transparency, accountability, justice, and social welfare. Digital accounting systems have significant potential to enhance these values through real-time reporting, improved auditability, and expanded financial inclusion. However, without proper ethical guidance, digitalization may also introduce risks such as over-reliance on automation, reduced moral awareness, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

The proposed SCDAIS model contributes to the literature by offering a comprehensive and integrative framework that connects digital technology, accounting systems, Sharia compliance, governance, and ethical outcomes. This model provides both theoretical and practical value by serving as a reference for future research, system development, and policy formulation in Islamic finance. In practical terms, the findings suggest that Islamic financial institutions should prioritize: (1) the integration of Sharia principles into system design rather than relying solely on external supervision; (2) the development of interdisciplinary competencies among IT developers, accountants, and Sharia scholars; (3) the establishment of standardized digital compliance frameworks; and (4) the alignment of technological innovation with ethical and social objectives.

In conclusion, this study affirms that a Sharia-Compliant Digital Accounting Information System is not simply a technological innovation, but a value-driven system architecture that embodies the integration of faith, ethics, and digital transformation. The successful development and implementation of SCDAIS will play a crucial role in strengthening the credibility, sustainability, and global relevance of Islamic financial practices in the evolving digital economy.

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