

JAIPUR

THE PINK CITY

by Norbert Schoenauer

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AFTER THE INDIAN UNION of 1947, Jaipur became the capital city of the newly formed state of Rajasthan, a name that translates as the 'abode of princes'. Rajasthan occupies a territory in northwest India that was previously called Rajputana, the land of the Rajput, who were, from the eleventh century, the dominant race in this territory which embraces both the region of the Aravalli Hills and that of the Thar Desert; the name Rajput derives from *rai-putra*, or the 'son of a prince'. The Rajput claim descent from the solar, lunar, and fire-born families of Kshatrijas, a warrior caste which in the social hierarchy is surpassed only by the Brahmins. Rajput women were highly regarded and according to legend, were created as companions to men.

The Rajput fought off the invading Moghuls for centuries and thus prevented Islam from conquering the whole of the Indian subcontinent. Amber, Chittor, and other fortresses of Rajput rulers emerged as bastions of resistance and refuge for Hindu culture threatened with extinction. Eventually, although the Rajput kings became allies of the Moghuls, they succeeded in retaining their position of strength as well as their culture in their own land.

Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh (1699-1743) was the founder of the walled city of Jaipur built during the second quarter of the eighteenth century as the new capital of his Rajput state. The former fortress capital, Amber, nestled in the Aravalli Hills, was relatively inaccessible, and this handicapped its commercial development at a time when the new political realities no longer justified such isolation for the purpose of defence. Hence, a new site was selected for the capital near the foothills of the Aravalli Range, only seven miles out of Amber.

Construction of the new town commenced in 1727 and its main sections were completed within the following six years.

Jaipur's Master Plan

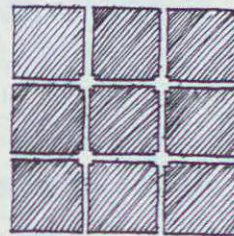
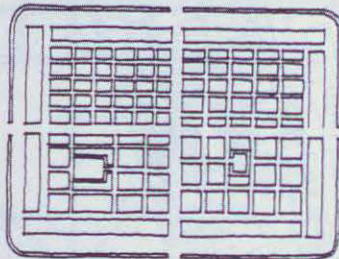
The physical form of the walled city was conceived as an orderly orthogonal cluster of nine roughly equal-sized square wards, or 'superblocks'. Whether these nine wards were to correspond to the nine treasures of Kubera (the Lord of Wealth), or to the nine planets of our solar system is mere speculation. More certain was the influence of the ancient Vedic *prastara* type of settlement layout characterized by a chessboard system of roads and streets, and where each ward was allocated to people of a particular profession or status in the urban social hierarchy.

Jai Singh's plan for Jaipur conformed to the traditional agrarian society's view that a city consisted of a collection of villages, but one cannot exclude the possibility of a certain

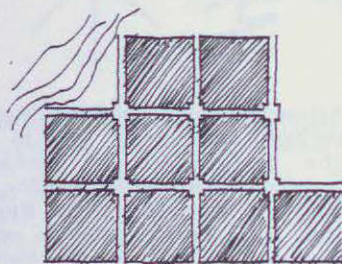
Sketches by the author

Layout: Jean-Claude Fillion and Lea Zeppetelli

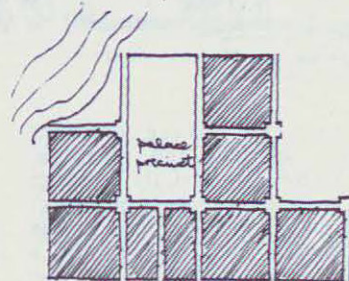
The Prastara Plan
after Ashim Kumar Roy



1. Conceptual Plan

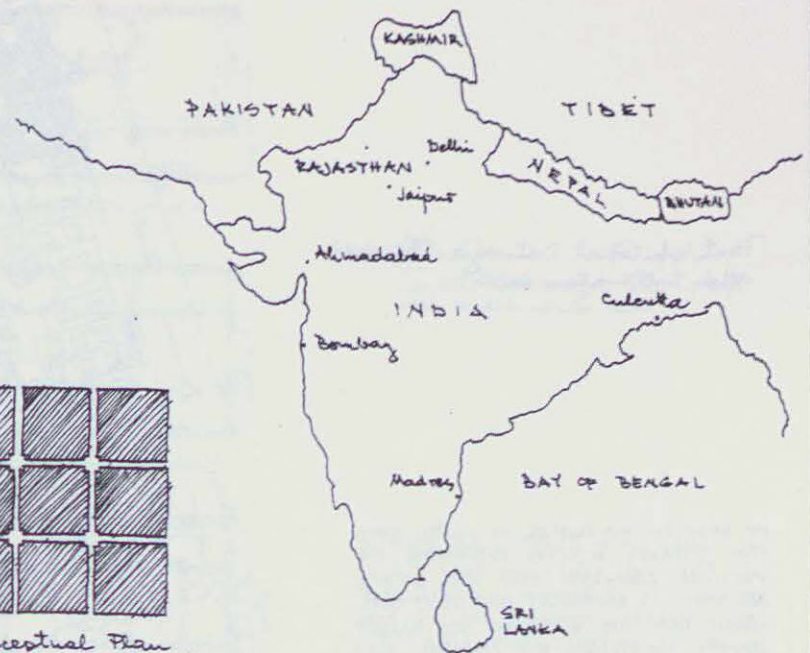


2. Effect of Topography



3. Final Plan

Evolution of Master Plan
after Kulkarni Jain



which was equipped with heavy bronze doors and preceded by a barbican. The city gates were closed every night at eleven o'clock and opened at daybreak. Nobody could enter or leave the city during the night, a custom also practised in medieval cities in Europe. This custom lasted in Jaipur until 1923, when Chandpol first was left open during the night for the convenience of train travellers using the nearby station.

The palace precinct was also surrounded by fortification walls similar to those surrounding the city and its corresponding gates, some of which still retain the original bronze doors, must have represented a second line of defense within the city proper.

The rectangular wards, or superblocks, called **chowkris**, were identified individually with a particular name. Typically each **chowkri** was further subdivided into a number of **mohallahs** or residential precincts, inhabited by a particular caste, religious group, or members of a trade guild. The square **chowkri** located immediately south of the palace precinct was divided into two wards by a new bazaar street developed during the nineteenth century; this bazaar street extended the north-south axis of the palace precinct and eventually received its own gate which is still known as the New Gate. It, of course, had no barbican.

Unquestionably, the founder of Jaipur envisaged a hierarchical order of street networks. The main bazaar streets, about one hundred eight feet,

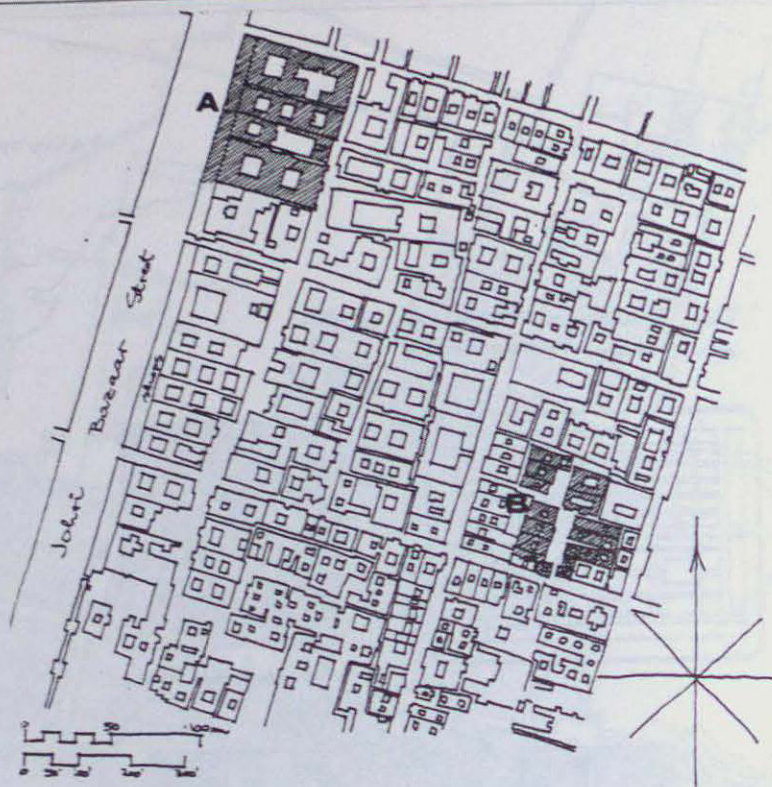
influence of eighteenth century European planning practices, because as was characteristic of Europe during that period, strict design control of buildings was exercised by Jaipur's founder along the principal thoroughfares and bazaar streets.

No doubt the cardinal points of the compass also imposed an important discipline on Jaipur's plan. The practice of a north-south and east-west orientation of street networks had a precedent in the ancient Indus Valley civilization as exemplified by the excavations both in Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa as well as at a later date in the Hellenistic city of Taxila, built after the conquest of the Punjab by Alexander the Great.

The conceptual geometric plan that should have resulted in a square city of nine wards nevertheless had to acknowledge restrictions imposed by the topography of the site. Located on a flat, dried-up bed of a former lake, flanked by two small rivers, well drained and in close proximity to an

ample source of quarry stone for building, the new town site was near ideal, but in its northwest corner was encroached by the steep slope of a hill crowned by Nahargar or the Tiger Fort. The steep contours of this hill necessitated the modification of the conceptual plan, whereby the northwest corner ward was transferred as an appendix to the southeastern corner of the town. The principle axis of the city was formed by an east-west bazaar street which linked the Surajpol (Gates of the Sun) to the Chandpol (Gates of the Moon) and thereby divided the city into two unequal halves; the eastern extension of this axis led to the Temple of the Sun. The southern half of the city had four superblocks, while the northern part had five, two of which, the central ones, were merged into one to form the palace precinct with its extensive gardens. The entire town site was surrounded by crenellated fortification wall twenty-five feet high and nine feet thick and access to the city was provided by eight main gates each of

*Part of Ghat Darwaja Chowkri
after Kulbhusan Jain*



or seventy-two hastas, in width, were the primary arteries delimiting the various **chowkris** and the palace precinct. A secondary grid of streets, about half the width of the bazaar streets, subdivided the **chowkris** into city blocks, each of which was then penetrated by a tertiary network of shaded narrow lanes, alleys, and cul-de-sacs. The primary roads or bazaar streets were not only wide and straight, but were also subject to regulations that prescribed the spatial organization and aesthetic treatment of the buildings lining them in order to ensure an effect of beauty. Accordingly, the main bazaar streets had on both sides a wide sidewalk running parallel to a modular arcade fronting a row of shops; the arcades and shops were in some cases built by the state, but the **havelis**, or large townhouses, two to three stories in height surmounting the shops behind the arcade were most often built by individuals. The facades of these **havelis** were also subject to some regulations and were generally adorned in the Hindu tradition with bay windows and **chattris**, to enhance the visual appeal of the street facade and its silhouette. In most instances, the **havelis** had their main entrance from the rear street but infrequently they could be reached from the front through a staircase wedged between two shops leading to the continuous roof terrace of the arcades. At the intersection of the major north-south and east-west bazaar streets, the building lines recessed to form large squares which became important nodal points, or **chaupars**, of the city. We can identify three **chaupars** along the main axis of Jaipur, namely Ramgay ki chaupar, Sanganer ki chaupar, and Amber ki chaupar. At these nodes, we find the important buildings and temples, the latter built on elevated platforms and reached by a wide and formal stairway ascending from the pavement to the platform, lending an additional aura of importance to the religious shrines.

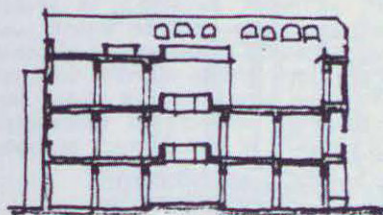
Of course, the palace precinct occupied a central and strategic position in the city and its buildings were the dominant elements of Jaipur. The main and formal entrance to the palace compound was Tripolia Gate, a triple gateway located near the intersection of the north-south axis of the palace precinct and the east-west main bazaar street. This gate led to an enclosed space with a jewel-like white marble building in its centre called Mubarak Mahal and used by the highest administrative body presided over by the Maharaja. A marble gate with heavy brass doors led to another space enclosure containing the Diwan-i-Khas, where private audiences were held. Diwan-i-Am, or the Hall of Public Audiences, was on the east side of the Diwan-i-Khas.

Chandar Mahal, the seven-storey main palace building with its royal quarters was located to the north-west of the Diwan-i-Khas and faced the a formal palace garden with fountains along its axis. Badal Mahal, or the Cloud Palace, and the Temple Shri Govind Deoji also faced the palace garden.

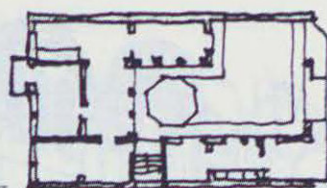
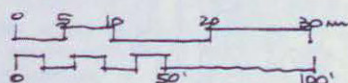
In front of the eastern gate of the palace precinct was a large square called Jaleb Chowk which, in the past, served as the assembly area for state processions with their various conveyances, including elephants. The surrounding chambers of this square accommodated the retinue of the Maharaja. To the south of Jaleb Chowk was the Jantar Mantar or the astronomical observatory built by Jai Singh.

Although most palatial buildings were secluded from public view to ensure the privacy of the Maharaja's household, one palatial building, Hawa Mahal, or the Palace of the Winds, did front on a bazaar street in order to provide members of the Maharaja's court and harem windows to the city. Hawa Mahal, built in 1799 by Jai Singh's grandson, Pratap Singh, was not a residential structure, but merely an ornate multi-storied facade with a multitude of screened oriels and balconies to provide viewing platforms for members of the royal court who had to respect the **purdah** and were forbidden to mingle with ordinary people, but nevertheless curious about them; their privacy was assured by the screened aperatures, and the members of the harem could gaze on the activities of the people in the streets below.

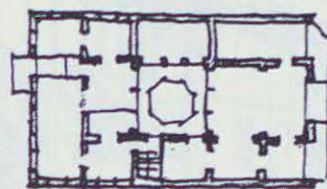
The courtyards of the **havelis** in Jaipur were unusual in that they most often had an octagonal plan and were relatively small. The size of the courtyard was justified by the extreme heat that prevails for many months of the year. Courtyards that were narrow and deep prevented sun radiating into the dwelling; moreover, the well-like courtyards retained the cool air accumulated during the night and, later in the day during the heat build-up, acted virtually as chimneys inducing a constant air movement in the surrounding habitable rooms. Climatic realities not only influenced the design of houses in Jaipur but also shaped the pattern of its streets and alleys in order to moderate effects of



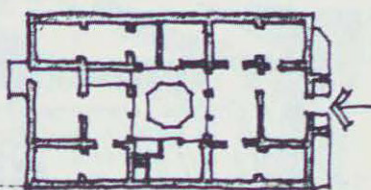
section



second floor plan



first floor plan



ground floor plan

*Modest haveli
Ghat Darwaja Chowki
after Kullbhusan Jain*

climate upon the urban environment. The pressure differential created between the wide sunny streets and narrow shaded alleys induces air movement even on calm days and a favourable micro-climate thus results.

The History of Jaipur

Judging from all historical accounts, it appears that Jaipur was a thriving urban centre from its beginning. Many rich merchants were invited to settle in Jaipur; they built large **havelis** and their mercantile activities ensured the rapid economic and physical growth of their adopted city. By 1734 the main bazaar streets, markets, and **chowkis** of the town were already completed, and with the tax concessions given by Jai Singh as incentives for businessmen, merchants, and artisans to settle in the new city, Jaipur became an important centre of trade. Following Nadir Shah's invasion of northern India in 1739 and the plunder of its cities, many Hindu and Jaina businessmen and merchants sought refuge in Jaipur, not only because of the unsettling events following enemy incursions, but also due to the restrictions imposed by the Moghul rulers upon their lives. In Delhi and other large cities, for example, Hindu merchants could not display their wealth and build large **havelis** without provoking the ire of the ruling class and thereby becoming victims of confiscatory taxation. Nadir Shah's, and later Ahmed Shah Abdali's incursions coupled with the common occurrence of highway robberies committed by the Sikhs in

Punjab caused the traditional imperial trade routes of northern India to gradually shift upward and eventually lead through Jaipur. Additional factors in the economic activity of Jaipur were, first, the build-up of a large administrative staff in Jai Singh's state, which was enlarged even more after the seat of government was moved from Amber; second, the fact that a number of attendants of the religious establishments were attracted to Jaipur to serve the population there (although Jai Singh himself apparently only built two important temples, namely Shri Govind Deoji's temple in the palace compound and Shri Kalkiji's temple along a bazaar street); and finally, the requirements by Jai Singh that all important Jagirdars of his state build homes in Jaipur; several large **havelis** of Jagirdars were thus built in all **chowkis** with the exception of Topkhana Hazuri which was developed only at a later date.

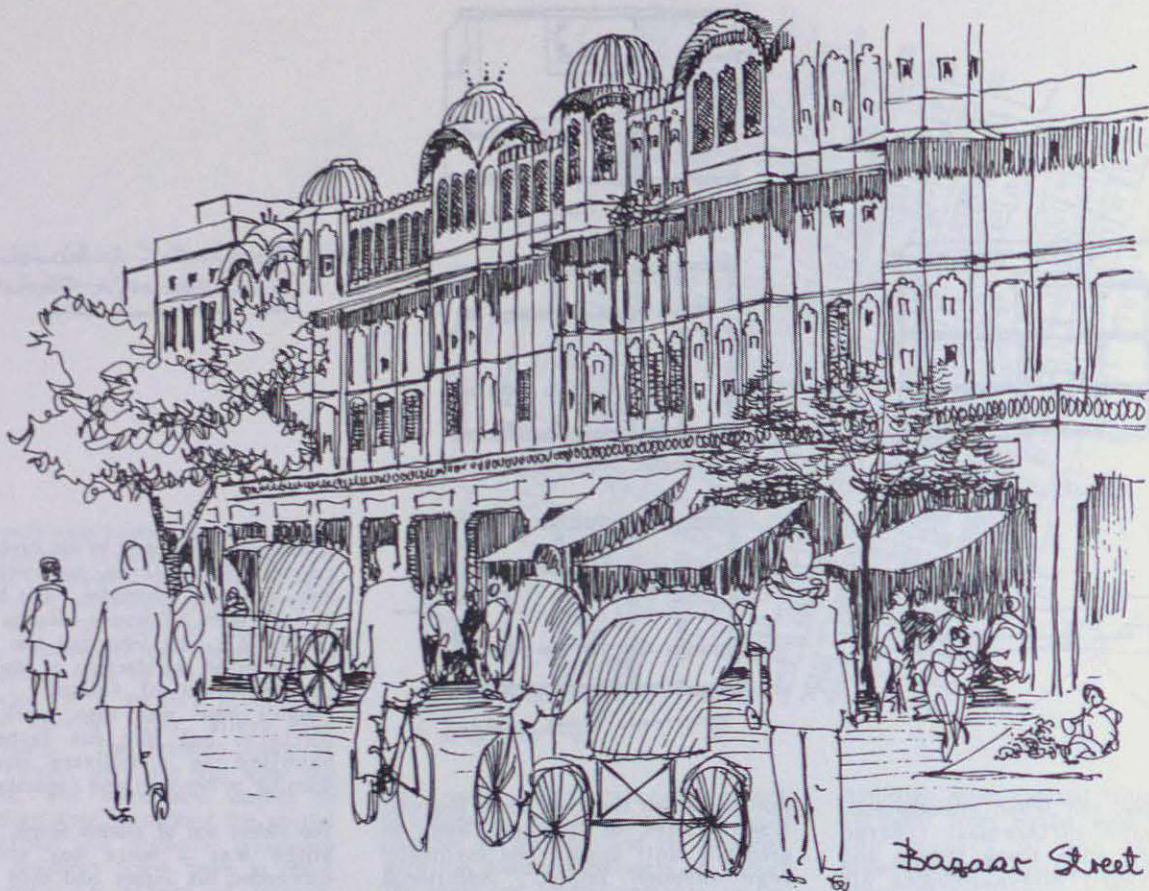
In the years following Jai Singh's death, Ishvari Singh (1743-1750), his eldest son, succeeded him and was challenged by his younger brother, Madho Singh, whose mother, a former princess of Mewar (Udaipur), was promised at the time of her marriage to Jai Singh that the throne would be given to her issue. Ishvari Singh defeated his brother in a battle and erected a victory tower, Ishvar Lat, in the palace precinct to commemorate this occasion; this tower is still a prominent landmark in Jaipur's skyline. However, Ishvar Singh's rule lasted only seven years; betrayed by his

officers and besieged in his capital, he committed suicide to avoid the humiliation of surrender. His brother and former adversary, Madho Singh (1750-1767) now inherited the throne to the great satisfaction of his uncle, the Maharaja of Udaipur. Madho Singh's rule was also marked by warfare, but like his father, he excelled as a military man not wanting in heroism and sagacity.

The eldest son of Madho Singh, Prithvi Singh was a mere boy when he succeeded his father and died before reaching maturity. His younger brother Pratap Singh (1778-1803) now inherited the reins of government and ushered in a new period of prosperity in Jaipur. The principal buildings built in this era were the Hawa Mahal, or Palace of the Winds, and the Shri Brijnandji's Temple.

The first decades of the nineteenth century saw much unrest in Rajputana. Large bands of Marathas and Pindaris roamed and plundered the countryside. Consequently, trade and commerce, the lifeline of Jaipur, suffered and its prosperity declined. Pratap Singh's son, Jagat Singh (1803-1819) became the head of state and sought protection from the British Government in restoring order in the countryside with a treaty signed in 1818.

Jagat Singh delegated nearly all of his responsibilities to one of his confidants and spent most of his time in his harem with his wives and concubines. Officially, Jai Singh III (1820-1835), born after his father's death, inherited the throne, but in fact his mother ruled as a Regent. This was a period of great anarchy further aggravated by a famine resulting from drought throughout Rajputana. The city's treasury became empty, the palaces desolate, houses fell into disrepair, and commerce stagnated. Squatters from the countryside sought refuge in the city and built mud platforms and



hovels along the centre of the wide bazaar streets. A.H.E. Boileau, an officer of the Survey of India, recorded these events during a visit to Jaipur in 1835, but also acknowledged that in spite of these hardships, Jaipur still displayed some cleanliness, regularity, and beauty.

With the ascent of Ram Singh (1835-1880) not only did a new epoch of prosperity dawn upon Jaipur, but during his reign, the city acquired its famous colouring. Originally Jaipur was a white city and only after some experimentation in the colourings of buildings along the various streets such as green, yellow, and pink, among others, did Ram Singh adopt pink as the trademark of Jaipur and had all buildings along the main thoroughfares painted pink on the occasion of a royal visit. Ever since that time Jaipur became known as the Pink City.

Ram Singh's forty-five year reign also saw the paving of major streets, the improvement of drainage, the installation of gas lights along the principal streets and palace grounds, as well as the construction of the Jaipur water works. This was the period when the image of the medieval town of the shopkeepers and tradesmen was replaced by that of a major city with cultural facilities such as public libraries, theatres, and art

schools. Ram Singh erected several large buildings on empty lots along the new bazaar street, Chaura Rasta, dividing the chowkri south of the palace precinct. He expanded the city beyond the fortification walls along the north-south axis of the palace grounds and built a large public garden, Ram Newas, outside the New Gate and a museum centred on this axis.

Hindi, the official language of Jaipur was replaced by Urdu during Ram Singh's reign. The first census taken in 1870 indicated that the population of the walled city of Jaipur was 116,563 with an additional 21,324 citizens living outside its walls. A subsequent comprehensive census in 1881 reported no increase in population which leads one to believe that a zenith had been reached. A decline followed, only to be reversed fifty years later.

In the 1930's Jaipur entered into a period of new prosperity and growth which necessitated the expansion of the urban area beyond the city walls. The usual uncontrolled urban sprawl so characteristic of most cities, however, did not take place in Jaipur, because the chief officer of the State, Sir Mirza Ismail, was a town planner. Sir Mirza ensured that expansion of Jaipur occurred in an orderly fashion adhering to aesthetic principles, although these

principles reflected Occidental rather than Oriental influences. Fortunately, from an aesthetic point of view, no changes took place within the walled city although the overcrowding reached alarming proportions in the 1970's reaching almost three times the population it had five decades before. Jaipur escaped the ravages of 'urban renewal' in spite of the fact that with the integration of the states of Rajputana into a single state, Jaipur now became its capital.

Jaipur's unique character and picturesqueness is preserved and it is hoped that the Pink City of the Rajputs will remain intact for many years to come to delight both citizens and visitors alike. □

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