

***A RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FIVE
FUNDAMENTAL DEMANDS OF SHAYKH UTHMAN BN FODUYE
FROM BAWA JAN-GWARZO***

**SIGNIFIKANSI AGAMA DAN POLITIK DARI LIMA PERMINTAAN
DASAR SHAYKH UTHMAN IBN FONDUE DARI BAWA JAN-
GWARZO**

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Abstract:

Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye started his preaching and teaching career at the age of twenty in 1774, moving from one place to another. He however, did not had contact with the kings of the land of Gobir until in about 1780 after attracting a number of substantial followers. Of all the four rulers of Gobir from Sultan Bawa to Yunfa, the relationship between Shaykh and



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Bawa was the most cordial. Bawa was one of the most powerful rulers of Gobir kingdom. The Shaykh invited him to practice Islam properly and establish justice in his land. Later on, Bawa became doubtful about his friendly attitudes towards the Shaykh. Consequent upon that, he planned against him at his court in Magami on Eid Adha festival but his plan could not be executed. He therefore changed his mind and offered some gifts which the Shaykh refused to take considering it as a bribe. Thus, the Shaykh requested for five things instead which were; to allow him preach in the land, not to stop anybody who wishes to accept Islam, to respect those wearing turban, to free all political prisoners and not to overburden the subjects with heavy taxes. This paper examines the religious and political significance of these requests in the light of the Shaykh's relationship with the four rulers of Gobir kingdom from Sultan Bawa to Yunfa. It also analyses the relevance of the discussions to the contemporary Muslims. To achieve this, some of the most relevant original historical sources were consulted and relevant data were evaluated.

Keywords: *Gobir Kingdom, Shaykh Uthaman bn Foduye, Fundamental Demand, Political Significance, Contemporary Muslims*

Abstrak:

Syekh Utsman bin Foduye memulai karir dakwah dan mengajarnya pada usia dua puluh tahun pada tahun 1774, berpindah dari satu tempat ke tempat lain. Namun, dia tidak memiliki kontak dengan raja-raja negeri Gobir sampai sekitar tahun 1780 setelah menarik sejumlah pengikut yang substansial. Dari keempat penguasa Gobir dari Sultan Bawa sampai Yunfa, hubungan Syekh dan Bawa adalah yang paling mesra. Bawa adalah salah satu penguasa kerajaan Gobir yang paling kuat. Syekh mengundangnya untuk mempraktekkan Islam dengan benar dan menegakkan keadilan di tanahnya. Belakangan, Bawa menjadi ragu dengan sikap ramahnya terhadap Syekh. Akibatnya, dia berencana melawannya di istananya di Magami pada hari raya Idul Adha tetapi rencananya tidak dapat dilaksanakan. Karena itu dia berubah pikiran dan menawarkan beberapa hadiah yang ditolak oleh Syekh karena menganggapnya sebagai suap. Oleh karena itu, Syekh meminta lima hal, yaitu; untuk mengizinkannya berdakwah di negeri ini, tidak menghentikan siapa pun yang ingin masuk Islam, menghormati mereka yang mengenakan sorban, membebaskan semua tahanan politik dan tidak membebani rakyat dengan pajak yang berat. Makalah ini mengkaji signifikansi agama dan politik dari permintaan ini dalam kaitannya dengan hubungan Syekh dengan empat penguasa kerajaan Gobir dari Sultan Bawa hingga Yunfa. Ini juga menganalisis relevansi diskusi dengan Muslim kontemporer. Untuk mencapai hal ini, beberapa sumber sejarah asli yang paling relevan dikonsultasikan dan data yang relevan dievaluasi.

Kata kunci: *Kerajaan Gobir, Syekh Uthaman bn Foduye, Tuntutan Dasar, Signifikansi Politik, Muslim Kontemporer*

A. Introduction

The life of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye can be classified into three different phases. Namely: pre-Jihad, during Jihad and the post Jihad. In the first phase, he was mainly concerned with the teachings, preaching and writings which he started in 1774CE. Thus; before embarking on this, he was fully equipped with the knowledge of various branches of Islamic sciences. Based on his wisdom, he started the first phase of his career educating the masses in Gobir, Kebbi and Zamfara kingdoms and later he turned to the unjust rulers and venal scholars. Consequently, he successfully won the hearts of many people. In Gobir kingdom, the Shaykh faced some confrontations from the rulers. His relation with the Sultan of Gobir Bawa, in the beginning was friendly. However, having realized the implications of the teachings and preaching of the Shaykh to his political power, Bawa planned to stop him. To execute his plan, Bawa invited the Shaykh along with other Muslim scholars from different places on the day of *eid al-Adha* to his court at a place called Magami. Bawa offered special gifts to the Shaykh and other scholars around. The Shaykh rejected the offer and instead requested for five things from Bawa among which was to allow him preach freely in Gobir kingdom. All the demands were granted. After Bawa's death, his immediate successor, Sultan Yaqub was silent on the status of these demands. However, Nafata who succeeded yaqub revoked these requests already granted by Bawa. This decision caused serious confrontations between the Shaykh and the incumbent rulers of Gobir – Nafata and Yunfa.

These demands granted to the Shaykh played a significant role in both religious and political status of the people in Hausaland particularly in Gobir kingdom. This paper therefore, analyses these demands and their significance on the religious and political lives of various classes of the contemporary Muslims.

When the Sokoto Caliphate in Nigeria was officially established in 1804, which was as result of the Jihad movement in Hausaland, it had already many unique features both historically and administratively, and when British forces occupied it in 1903, its special characteristic has amazed this new colonial power. After the independency of Nigeria in 1960, it came more often to the academic agenda of the history scholars, and since this date it has been discussed within the possibility of the available sources.¹

¹ Kerem Duymuş, The Economic Policies in the Sokoto Caliphate within the Early Period (1800-1817), Seminar Paper delivered on “African History” at the University of Bayreuth on March 26th 2020.

Pre-Jihad Phase

Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye was born in the land of Gobir at Maratta in the year 1754CE. He learnt the Qur'an, and art of reading and writing under his parents at Degel.² He further learnt other Islamic sciences from different scholars of his time among whom was Shaykh Jibrin bn Umar. He became well versed in Islamic sciences and could now teach and call people to practice pure Islam. He was therefore concerned with the explanations of the fundamentals of Islam and correcting the wrong practices of Islam that have for long developed in Hausaland.³ The Shaykh traveled far east and west teaching and preaching against un-Islamic practices. Many people from different places accepted his call and supported him.

At the beginning, the Shaykh did not pay attention to rulers until after he had gained the support of the majority of the masses. On one occasion, the Shaykh had visited the king of Gobir, Bawa Jan Gwarzo and explained to him the true Islamic teachings and advised him to apply justice in his land.⁴ Despite all the ridicule blackmail and rejection by people in the course of his mission, the Shaykh continued to call people to the way of Allah and in accordance with the level of their comprehension. Thus, his perseverance and beautiful preaching earned him the support of many people.⁵ The Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye traveled to different places such as Kebbi, Zamfara areas and kept on calling people to keep away from repugnant customs and traditional religion like worship of Jinn, trees, graves, sorcery, indecent exposure, unlawful bowing, unfair business practices, among others.⁶

The Shaykh was fully concerned with the religious, political, social and economic transformation of the people to conform to the accepted norms and values of Islam. It is also evident that the first phase of his career was mainly dedicated to the study, teaching and preaching.

² U. M. Bugaje, "The Sakkwato Model: A study of the origin, Development and Fruition of the Jihad of Uthman bn Foduye (1754-1817CE), A paper presented at International Islamic Conference, BUK, 16th-22nd April, 1980, p.6

³ A. H. Quick, Aspects of Islamic Social Intellectual History in Hausa Land: Usman bn Fudi (1174-1804CE), A Ph.D Thesis, Department of History, University of Toronto, 1995, p.85

⁴ A. Foduye, *Tazyin al-Waraqat bi Jam' ba'd maly min al-Abyat*, U. M. Boyi, *Taudih al-Ghamidat ala Tazyin al-Waraqat*, Tab'at al-Thalithah, np, Sokoto, 1438AH/2016, pp.48-49

⁵ S. Yusuf, *A History of Islam, Scholarship and Revivalism in Western Sudan, being an Annotated Translation with Introduction of Infaqul Maysur fi Tarikh Bilad al-Takrur of Sultan Muhammadu Bello bn Fodio*, Tamaza Publishing Company Ltd, Zaria, 2013, pp.133 & 136

⁶ A. Quick, op.cit, p.5

Hausaland, where Shehu Usman Dan Fodio was destined to live and thrive, was located in the middle of what early Muslim historians called Bilad al-Sudan (the land of the blacks), which is the vast Savannah grassland stretching from Sene-Gambia in West Africa to the red sea in the east.⁷ Islam had spread in this region since the eight century. Prior to the spread of Islam, the region had been linked with North Africa by the trans-Sahara trade route that brought manufactured goods from the Mediterranean region and the world beyond in an exchange for gold which appeared to have been in abundance. With the spread of Islam in the region the trans-Saharan trade routes increased and as trade grew, intra-regional route developed, spreading Islam further into the region. It was the good fortune of Hausaland the people of Bilad al-Sudan that Allah raised among their ranks a scholar who was not prepared to accept the decadent status-quo with the usual fatalism as the will of Allah, but saw it as his primary assignment to change it.⁸ For sure, Shehu Usman Ibn Fodio did not, and could not have, set out early in his life to teach, write and educate people that led to the eventual establishment of an Islamic state and society which spread beyond his little state of Gobir.

B. Methods

The approach used in writing this paper is a literature study approach. Basically, the study of literature is the same as research in general, but the data obtained by the researchers is secondary data using the literature study method. Some steps that the researcher will take in preparing this article include: first, the researchers searches for and collects reference sources that are relevant to the theme of this research. Second, several scientific papers that have been collected are then processed and elaborated, in order to comprehensively explain the inter-sections of this article. Third, as the last step, the researchers concludes specifically referring to the title raised in this study, namely the religious and political significance of the five fundamental demands of Shaykh Uthman bn Foduye from Bawa Jan-Gwarzo

C. Result and Discussion

1. The Five Requests by the Shaykh From the King of Gobir

⁷ G. I. Rabiou, & A. I. Ahmad, Reformation of Islamic Knowledge in Hausaland: The Life, Contentions and Contributions of Usman Ibn Fodio. *Journal of Creative Writing* Vol.3 (1), 2017, pp. 32-47.

⁸ I. Sulaiman, A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio, London, Np, 1986.

By the time the Shaykh became well known and had huge supporters were spread across the Hausaland scholars and masses, Allah had protected him against his enemies. He was empowered with a group of sincere scholars and was able to revive the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the land. Consequent upon that, the rulers showed their enmity towards him, while from the onset they respected him and even sought for his prayers.⁹ In fact, they were not happy with the Shaykh because of his religious stand fearing the disappearance of their political powers which were not based on Islamic principles of government.¹⁰

Bawa was said to have tolerated the traditional pagan cults among his subjects though he made some claim to Islam. The existence of the over whelming supporters of the Shaykh must certainly embarrassed him. Bawa was afraid to accept the requestss of the Shaykh to destroy un-Islamic practices and customs as such would undermine his own power base. But the Shaykh was eager to convert Bawa to practice Islam correctly and not to fight him.¹¹

In 1202AH/1788CE when the Shaykh was in Zamfara, an incidence occurred which indicated that Bawa had become doubtful about the Shaykh's friendly attitude towards the Muslims. He summoned the Shaykh along with other scholars on the day of *Id al-Adha* to his court at Magami. Some sources revealed that Bawa plotted to kill the Shaykh and his companions as he considered the strength of Islam and the power of its faithful as a serious threat to his own position. Considering the impossibility of executing his plan against the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah*, Bawa changed his mind and offered some gifts to the scholars invited including the Shaykh who was given five hundred *mithqals* of gold, the gift which he turned down as he considered it a bribe. Instead, he requested for the followings:

1. To allow him to call to the way of Allah in Gobir land
2. Not to stop anybody who wishes to respond to Shehu's call
3. To treat with respect, any man with a turban
4. To free all political prisoners and
5. Not to overburden the subjects with taxes.¹²

Fortunately, Bawa accepted all the requests of the Shaykh. Thus, it could be said that the Shaykh was taking some precautionary measures against the Gobir rulers who might

⁹ A. Foduye, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, op.cit, p.53

¹⁰ A. Yusuf, op.cit, p.190

¹¹ K. Mohammed, "The Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio: The Reformer, The Renovator and the Founder of the Sokoto Caliphate (1774-1817CE)", A Thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts in African Civilization, Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts, Department of Anglo-saxon languages, University of Oran, 2009, p.90

¹² Ibid, p.91

likely oppose his mission and persecute his followers. His main concern was how to educate the people about Islam and spread it throughout the land.

Shaykh Abdullahi his brother, mentioned that when Sultan Bawa accepted the requests of the Shaykh, they gave thanks to Allah for giving them the favour and opportunity to spread the religion of Islam while other scholars returned home rejoicing with the worldly gains.¹³

2. Reactions of the Successors of Bawa on the Five Demands

Throughout the period of Bawa as Gobir ruler, the relationship between him and the Shaykh was cordial. It was revealed that after the incidence at Magami, Bawa sought for Shaykh's counsel in his campaign against the town of Maradi which he did.¹⁴ After the death of Bawa in 1203-4AH/1789-90CE, his brother Yaqub succeeded him. Like Bawa, Sultan Yaqub was not reported to have made any physical move against the requests granted to the Shaykh by Bawa. He reigned for only six years and was killed at Magami in the year 1794CE.¹⁵

After him, the power of Gobir kingdom went to Sultan Nafata. At that time the power and prominence of the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah* were on the rise. Nafata and his successor Yunfa were not ready to accept the requests of the Shaykh. That was because of their lapses, falsehood, misjudgments and the fact that their authorities and policies were parallel to the teachings of Islam and was not ready to accept the reformation the Shaykh wanted to bring. Therefore, when the Shaykh explained to the commoners the true perspective of Islamic socio-political, economic and religious systems, the rulers and their followers began to persecute and harm his followers in different ways. Despite this condition, the Shaykh did not relax in his mission, instead he continued and his honour and prestige also continued to rise up and people, particularly among the poor continued to accept Islam en- mass. So the rise and development of Islam in Hausaland were not what the then rulers of Gobir wanted and appreciated because the system of their government was embedded in corrupt practices that frowned Islam. Hence, the war between the Shaykh and the rulers who were not ready for the change could not be averted.¹⁶

¹³ U. M. Boyi, *Fassarar Tazyinul Waraqati Bi Jam'I Ba'd Mali Minal Abyat*, Al-Ameen Print Ltd., Sokoto, p.22

¹⁴ K. Muhammad, op.cit, p.91

¹⁵ Ibid, p.93

¹⁶ U. M. Shareef, *The Revival of the Sunnah and Destruction of Innovation by Shehu Uthman Dan Foduye: Introduction and Translation*, Institute of Islamic African Studies International, Sudan,1998, p.39

By 1794CE, the Shaykh began to urge his followers to prepare themselves in case of war between them and the tyrant rulers of Gobir. This urge frightened the rulers, and the then Sultan of Gobir Nafata which forced him to issue some certain restrictive measures and laws against Muslims. For example, he issued an order that:

- a. Nobody was allowed to preach except the Shaykh
- b. Nobody was allowed to accept the religion of Islam except those who had inherited it from their forefathers and those who were not born Muslims should return to their former religion of paganism
- c. Men should not wear turban and women should not wear *hijab*.¹⁷

The restrictions placed by Nafata which amounted to revoking the requests of the Shaykh granted earlier by Sultan Bawa. Allah, out of His will protected the Muslims against the evil plans of Nafata as he died shortly after given these decrees. His son Yunfa succeeded him in 1802CE-1803CE. In the same vein, Yunfa also tried all he could to implement to the sanctions instructed by his father against the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah*.¹⁸ Following this development, the Shaykh motivated his people to prepare to defend themselves against the plots of their enemies. There was a report that Yunfa had made an attempt to assassinate the Shaykh at Alkalawa in 1803CE. He also attacked his people under Abdul-Salam (one of the Shaykh's students) at Gimbana. In 1804CE, the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah* launched a Jihad against the rulers of Hausa land which had laid a solid foundation of Islamic education and awareness in the land. The Jihad led to the establishment of a society based on the dictate of the *Shari'ah*.

3. Religious Significance of the Shaykh's Requests

The requests granted the Shaykh by Bawa played significant role towards the development of Islam. The acceptance of these requests suggested that the rulers were opposed to his preaching and teachings or something similar to that. However, with this development, the Shaykh was given full freedom to preach and call people to Islam. This gave him an opportunity to travel widely in the land of Gobir to preach and teach pure Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

The Shaykh was able to train a body of scholars and students whom he left behind to continue instructing his increasing number of followers the basic tenets of Islam as well as his ideas of reformation; experiences of his society concerning its nature, problems and

¹⁷ A. Foduye, *Tazyin al-Waraqat*, op.cit, p.54

¹⁸ U. M. Shareef, op.cit, p.39

aspirations and lay a sound intellectual vehicle for his revolution.¹⁹ He had raised an adequate number of students and scholars across Hausa land who taught and called to Islam in line with his mission of reform. By the turn of 19th century, the rate of the growth of the supporters of the Shaykh had reached a highest proportion which frightened Nafata the king of Gobir. The Shaykh taught people the fundamental of Islam, *mu'amalat* and *Ibadat*. It was due to the significant impacts of his teachings and preachings that the decrees issued by Nafata revoking the earlier demands could not have any positive effect.²⁰

The Shaykh attracted a large number of followers who had better understand of Islam as a result of which they were ready to face the challenges and persecutions of Gobir rulers than to cut off their attachment to the Shaykh. They sincerely supported him thinking about the spiritual benefits in the Hereafter. This was the result of the intensive training and Islamic education they received from the Shaykh from the onset. Some of the religious significance of this request was his effort in eradicating the evils being practiced by many people in the land of Gobir. He was able to preach openly and obtained one of the religious rights of his students and followers who were identified by putting on their turbans as part of the Sunnah practices.²¹

The refusal of the Shaykh to receive the gifts of Sultan Bawa was an indication of how he detested corruption and his readiness to teach people about its evil in the land of Gobir. Instead of the gift, he asked for the actualization of his mission which was to spread the true teachings of Islam and eradicate evils traditional religious and political practices among the rulers of Gobir and their followers.

4. Political Significance of the Requests

The requests granted to the Shaykh by Bawa led to a kind of revolutionary leadership in Hausaland. The Shaykh's position was not just that of a scholar who teaches and preaches but after the episode of Magami, he increasingly found himself as the head of a growing revolutionary party. Having taught and preached for nearly thirty (30) years and was fully aware of the people's organizational ability and potentialities, did not go into military confrontations with their enemies. This no doubt reflects his able and firm leadership.²²

¹⁹ A. H. Quick, op.cit, pp.90-91

²⁰ U. M. Bugaje, op.cit, p.13

²¹ A. H. Quick, op.cit, p.87

²² U.M. Bugaje, op.cit, p.17

The requests granted the Shaykh also showed his active involvement in the affairs of people generally in Gobir kingdom. Consequently, the freeing of a prince or Sultan of Zamfara Abarshi of Anka would endear him politically to the leadership of that region and spoke a lot of political influence of the Shyakh in the Hausa land.²³

The freedom given to the Shaykh to preach in the land gave him the opportunity to attract large number of followers. This development made the rulers of Gobir and their followers apprehend about the activities of the Muslims in the land. Subsequent attack on the Muslims at Gimbana which led to the killings of many Muslims in addition to other reasons, the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah* migrated from Degel to Gudu in 1804CE. He was given *bay'ah* by the Muslims as the commander of the faithful.²⁴ Consequently, a number of battles were fought which led to the establishment of an Islamic state known as Sokoto Caliphate. Shaykh Abdullah bn Foduye composed a poem thanking and glorifying Allah for their successes in establishing an Islamic State.²⁵

5. Relevance of the Five Requests by the Shaykh on Gobir Leadership to Contemporary Muslims

The five requests by the Shaykh are very much relevant and significant to the contemporary Muslims in their religious, political, economic and social lives. Each of the five requests represents certain features in the lives of the Muslims. Firstly, the invitation by Sultan Bawa of the scholars of his kingdom including, the Shaykh, had some hidden agenda. As Bawa's desires were not actualized, he tried to corrupt the scholars by offering some gifts to them which the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah* (community) refused to take. This phenomenon of corrupting the scholars by the leaders is still obtainable in the contemporary period. It is to be noted that for *Da'i* (caller to Islam) to succeed in his mission, he has to distance himself from the love of worldly gains particularly in the hands of the leaders. This was what made the Shaykh to succeed as his intention to reform the society was sincere and in line with the dictate of the *Shari'ah* as Allah says in the Qur'an:

And they were not commanded except that they should worship Allah and worship none but Him alone (sincerely, abstaining from ascribing partners to Him) and perform *salah* and give *zakah* and that is the right religion.²⁶

²³ A.H. Quick, op.cit, p.87

²⁴ M. Boyi, op.cit, p.65

²⁵ Ibid, pp.66-67

²⁶ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Bayyinah, 98:5.

The first request by the Shaykh which was to allow him preach in the land of Gobir has also much connection with the present time. The Shaykh was not the only scholar during his own time. He however, pleaded with the authority to allow him preach to people about Islam, hence other scholars were corrupt and were only dancing to the tunes of the rulers. It could be understood that what is required today is not just preaching by different scholars in every nook and cranny of the society, but the need for scholars no matter few they are is to be sincere and they should be able to undertake the main purpose of preaching to reform the society to abstain from its evils and corrupt practices.

In the second request, the Shaykh pleaded with the Gobir authority not to prevent those who wish to accept Islam. This shows the tolerance and peaceful nature of Islam. Where Allah states in the Glorious Qur'an;

There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong Path. whoever disbelieves In *Taghut* and believes In Allah, Then He has grasped the Most trustworthy handhold that will never break. and Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower²⁷.

Unlike the period when Shaykh was making those requests, Muslims of today understand Islam better. However, today's problem is not about the question of responding to the call of Islam, but the implementation of Islamic teachings. The ideals of Islam in the practice of the religion as advocated by the Shaykh are furthermore corrupted similar to what was obtained during his time. Therefore, the way to reform is to have individual commitment and sincerity towards Islamic obligations in one's relationship with his Creator in one hand and all other creatures in the other hand.

In the third request which was to treat with respect anyone with a turban is part of the teachings of *shari'ah*. In fact, through the use of turban for male, Muslims can be identified and respected, particularly in this modern era when many male Muslims consider the use of turban as something primitive and uncivilized.

Freeing of political prisoners which was the fourth request signifies the fact that detainees in the prisons require special attention by the State authorities. There is the need to ensure that innocent people are not illegally imprisoned as Islamic system of justice demands. The last of the five requests was to lessen the burden of taxes on the masses. This great concern of the Shaykh teaches Muslims of the contemporary era particularly leaders that the

²⁷ Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqara, 2:256.

welfare of the masses should be part of their priority. The leaders and the rich should compassion towards the less privileged in the society.

D. Conclusion

The five requests by the Shaykh had played significant role in reviving the religious and political lives of the Muslims in Gobir kingdom and beyond. It gave the Shaykh and his *Jama'ah* the opportunity to adequately call people to the way of Allah and properly taught them about the true teachings of Islam, warning them of the evil practices which had engulfed the lives of the majority. Though he was subsequently challenged by some rulers of Gobir in his mission, he was able to withstand pressure and difficulties towards achieving his goal. His confidence and sincerity towards Allah strengthen his resolute which finally led to the establishment of Islamic State of Sokoto Caliphate. It is pertinent to stress that, the contemporary Muslim scholars, teachers, rulers, business men among others can learn some lessons that are very significant such as sincerity, confidence, humbleness, moderation, loyalty, mercy, compassion, good administration, among others in their lives.

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