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PASTORAL DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

ISSN: 0951 1911

Paper 25c
March, 1988

THE DECLINE OF LAHAWIN PASTORALISM

(KASSALA PROVINCE, EASTERN SUDAN)

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I INTRODUCTION

The pastoralist groups whose dry-season camps lie on the river Atbara upstream of the New Halfa scheme have received less attention than many other pastoralist societies in Sudan, but are an important example of the direct encroachment on pastoralist resources by extensive mechanised rainfed farming. This paper introduces the area and the main pastoralist group, the Lahawin, and describes the threat to them of mechanised farming and other factors.

Extensive mechanised rainfed farming, of sorghum (and sesame in some areas) has been expanding in the rainlands of Sudan since the 1950s, and received a further boost in the late 1970s with the injection of Saudi and other capital under the so-called 'Arab Breadbasket' policy. Expansion is still continuing. The normal framework is for private investors, usually urban merchants', to obtain from the parastatal Mechanised Farming Corporation a lease on a 1000 or 1500 acre plot of rainland, upon which they then become eligible for a wide range of soft loans and other services. Land is initially cleared, then disc-ploughed and sown in a single operation each year; weeding and harvesting are done manually by seasonal migrant labour. The structure of profitability encourages the adoption of highly deleterious farming practices for a few years, after which a new plot can be leased. It also encourages the extension of cultivation onto marginal lands outside the scheme limits, on which an existing farming operation can make profits. This extension by registered farmers is recognised by the MFC, and there are also cases of farmers cultivating without obtaining any lease from the MFC, but nonetheless receiving MFC services.(1)

Mechanised farming policy is based on the premise that there is empty land available for cultivation. In practice, demarcated schemes, and even more so unofficial and illegal cultivation, have encroached massively on pastoral grazing lands.

There are in the Eastern Region of Sudan 3 million feddans(2) under mechanised cultivation by registered farmers, of which about 70% is outside demarcated schemes (ILO/UNHCR 1984). By contrast, only 0.6 million feddans are cultivated by smallholders. Average holding on mechanised land is three schemes per lessee, but 'substantial numbers of farmers' farm 10,000-35,000 feddans. The leaseholders are predominantly merchants from Gedaref, Khartoum and the North, but they include some wealthy ex-pastoralists, particularly from the Shukriyya and Dubania tribes (ibid.). Agricultural labour is predominantly supplied by seasonal migrants from Western Sudan, and now by Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees from settlements and reception centres in the region. The northern limit of demarcated schemes is around 14 30' N, but cultivation by registered farmers on undemarcated land, and illegal cultivation, take place north of this.

II THE AREA OF STUDY

The study, based on informal interviews, took place in the dry season, when Lahawin and other pastoralists were mainly camped along rivers. The area studied covered the valley of the Atbara from Safawa (13 07'N) to the Khashm el Girba dam (14 56'N), and the valley of the Setit for about 40km above its confluence with the Atbara (see map). This includes parts of both the North Gedaref and South Gedaref Districts of Kassala Province. However, as Sudanese local government still has some features of a tribal administration, all Lahawin in these areas are subject to administration from Showak'.

Physically the area is one of low to medium rainfall, 200-600 mm per year, mainly concentrated in the period June to September. The relief changes from the flat plains of the Butana, with several major inselbergs, in the northwest, to more undulating country in the south. The Atbara river flows from south to north, joined by the Setit at latitude 14 20'. Both rivers have cut deep valleys, forming a characteristic eroded clay topography known as karib. The Atbara was dammed at Khashm al Girba in the north in 1958 and now forms an artificial lake for 25 km south of the dam.

The original vegetation of the area forms three broad zones.(3) In the northwest the Butana plain is described as semi-desert grassland on clay. The Showak area is described as Acacia mellifera thornland on dark cracking clay, alternating with grass areas, while further south lies a belt of Acacia seyal balanites savanna, alternating with grass areas. In practice the three zones merge into each other, and the latter two have been distinctly transformed by deforestation and the spread of mechanised farming. One further environmental feature is the seasonally-flooded alluvial soil, jerif, found on the river banks, though not throughout the area.

The original inhabitants of the Showak area seem to have been the Dubania and the Hamran, two small ethnic groups now arabised. One Dubania section live as pastoralists in patterns similar to pastoral Lahawin, otherwise both groups are peasant cultivators. Overall hegemony in the broader Gedaref-Butana area was held in the nineteenth century by the Shukriyya, a large Arabic-speaking pastoral tribe, and it was under this hegemony that the Lahawin, who had previously moved as pastoralists between the White Nile and Kordofan, moved to the Showak area. This occurred no earlier than 1870, and sections were still arriving up to 1920. The reasons for the move seem to have been a) Lahawin dislike of the growing power of the al-Tom family over the Kababish tribes with whom they were reckoned, b) lower rates of taxation in Eastern Sudan than in Kordofan, and c) the strategy of the Shukriyya Nazir of representing Lahawin to the colonial authorities as landless nomads, to be lightly taxed, so the resulting tax reduction could be spread across his own tribe also.(4) Lahawin-Shukriyya relations after the move were variable, but have generally been amiable, and in the final version of colonial 'native administration' the Lahawin were reckoned as one of three major divisions of the Eastern Shukriyya Nazirate. The Lahawin do not refer to their recent Kordofanian origins, but, presumably because of their links with the dominant Shukriyya, regard themselves as more rightful owners of the land than other ethnic groups who actually arrived at much the same time: West Africans ('Fellata') and various peoples from Western Sudan, Beni Amer from the Eritrean borderlands, and Rashaida Arabs from Arabia. Currently the villages north of Showak town are mainly

Lahawi, while those immediately upstream are a mixture of Dubania, Lahawin, Beni Amer and Westerners, with villages further up the Atbara, and along the Setit, being mainly Fellata. Along much of the length of the rivers Lahawi pastoralists form regular dry-season camps, alongside Lahawi or non-Lahawi villagers. Rashaida Arabs are also pastoralists, but keep separate from, and are economically and culturally quite different from, Lahawin.(5)

34,761 Lahawin were enumerated throughout Sudan in the 1955/6 First National Census, the last to include information on tribe and ethnic group. This would give an estimate for current Sudan-wide Lahawin population of 50,000 or more. Of these 8-9,000 are settled in villages on the west bank of the Atbara around and North of Showak, around 20,000 in villages on the New Halfa scheme, and the great majority of the remainder in pastoral camps or villages formed by recent sedentarisation.

The villages north of Showak on the west bank of the Atbara, and some villages elsewhere, seem to have formed in the late 1950s as a result of two processes:

a) the loss of herds due to drought, and
b) the desire to claim jerif land before others, e.g. Fellata, did so.

The economy of these villages, and Mogatta, the tribal headquarters, which was settled rather earlier, is based on manual sorghum cultivation on customarily held rainfed land near the villages, some cultivation, mainly of watermelons for the market, on the jerif, and some keeping of animals. Following the severe drought of 1984, 56% of these villagers have no animals (SCF-USA 1986) but a small number of families move with the herds as families, and more importantly young men from the villages are still herding animals in the Butana over the rains on behalf of their families or others. The villagers appreciate the benefits of settling e.g. better services, but may be expected to return increasingly to this system if they can rebuild herds.

The Agrar- und Hydrotechnik GMB report of 1978, quoted in Sorbo 1985,(6) found that 2358 Lahawin were tenants of the New Halfa Scheme,

which, with families, meant a Lahawin population of 22990. Settlement of pastoralists on the Scheme by the irrigated farming of cotton, groundnuts and sorghum was begun in 1965. The Scheme, and the relations of Shukriyya pastoralism to it, have been the subject of much literature (see especially Sorbo, 1985). This demonstrates that the flexibility of traditional extended family organisation allows tenants to retain a substantial stake in pastoralism, despite Scheme restrictions on animal numbers by sending animals out into the Butana with certain family members or certain whole households. This has had an adverse effect on the Butana rangelands near the Scheme. Lahawin on the Scheme have probably also followed these strategies, so this is one reason why the number actually resident on the Scheme may be smaller than the figure quoted above. The other is that some Lahawin in villages outside the Scheme hold tenancies, either farmed on their behalf by relatives, or sharecropped by people of Western Sudanese origin.

III LAHAWIN PASTORALISM

Many Lahawin did not participate in the spontaneous settlement of the 1950s or the planned settlement on the Scheme. Until the recent drought, all these were living as transhumant pastoralists, in that whole families (at least some whole families from each camp) moved with the herds over a yearly cycle. Currently, many such groups are in the process of settling, as herds have been lost, and access to grazing land, especially in the dry season, is getting more difficult. The pastoralists in general reside for the whole dry season (October to June) on the rivers of the study area, returning each year to the same camps. It is here that those who give up pastoralism settle. Of groups who retain enough stock to necessitate pastoral migration, those on the east bank move towards Kassala, and groups on the west bank towards New Halfa and beyond, for the rainy season. On the move north the members of each dry-season camp, which is also a political unit, the mashaikh, continue to camp together, though they may be more dispersed than in the dry-season.

The Lahawin herd camels and smallstock. When they first moved into the area, they concentrated on camels, in contrast to the less mobile

Shukriyya who were cattle owners. Since that time pastoral Lahawin diversified into cattle to some extent, but cattle were the most vulnerable in the recent drought, and Lahawin say they do not want to rebuild cattle herds.

Pastoral Lahawin generally also cultivate sorghum on rainfed fields. The way this cultivation fits into their pastoral cycle varies; the fields are usually near the dry season camps, but sometimes nearer the rainy season pastures, or in places in between. In general groups of pastoralists who still practice yearly migration are the better-off, and these can afford to hire tractors to harrow and seed, unlike recently settled pastoralists or the villagers north of Showak. Only 7% of the latter seeded mechanically (SCF-USA 1986), while in most pastoral communities who farmed, mechanical cultivation was the norm. Tractors are hired to them for around £40/hour, with immediate payment. This form of agriculture is not one that needs a continuous supply of labour, and can thus be combined with herding, especially by forms of extended family co-operation: for example, a father (and his own household) may stay near the dry season camp to cultivate, while his married sons (with their families) make the pastoral migration north.

A Lahawi mashaikh has, in most areas, a customary right to its riverside dry-season site, and collectively to grazing and tree browse around it although there are no strict boundaries. Rights to grazing and water in the rainy season seem less fixed. The colonial reservation of the eastern Butana and certain hafirs (reservoirs for run-off) for Lahawin and Eastern Shukriyya has lapsed (see Sorbo 1985). Rights to arable land are also held by custom, on a loose family basis.

These land rights are not formally recognised in Sudanese law, though some Lahawin, particularly villagers, have registered their arable lands. Registered or not, there is some de facto security of tenure for arable land, in that they are unlikely to be appropriated by either the state or mechanised farmers. This is not the case for grazing lands. As grazing land is not registered, it is often argued

at various levels that it is 'empty', and pastoralists do not have the connections to block its expropriation.

The traditional diet of Lahawin pastoralists, and indeed villagers, consists throughout the year of sorghum porridge (the sorghum is purchased if the family has not produced enough to last the year) with a sauce made from dried okra, onions, chillies and other vegetables. Milk may be added to the sauce depending on the season (highest milk yields are in the rainy season) and whether the families have accompanied the herds. Meat is eaten occasionally; slaughtered animals are shared around the community.

Lahawin pastoralists regularly sell animals on the hoof, in Showak, Gedaref or other town markets, where they are bought for butchering or profitable resale and in some cases export. These sales play a vital part in maintaining the pastoral economy in which not only do people consume large amounts of purchased grain, but increasingly fodder for animals has to be bought. On the east bank of the Atbara we were told that a pastoral family has to sell 25-30 sheep or 3-4 camels a year. While these figures are not reliable enough for a full account of household budgets, they give soem idea of the large amounts of cash, several thousand pounds per year, passing through a Lahawi household, mostly spent on purchase of grain and crop residues. Prices are highest when animals return fattened from the rains, but most pastoralists need to sell throughout the year. Lahawin do not to any great extent sell animal by-products. Milk is reserved firstly for the herds, secondly for home consumption, and there seems to be no tradition of sale in most areas. Skins from domestic slaughter are cured and used for waterskins etc. within the community.

The position of all the pastoral and recently settled groups is precarious. Groups that have recently settled have done so in a context different from that of the 1950s: there is much less land available for agriculture. They thus have neither a large agricultural surplus nor the security of herds. Most of these communities have become extremely poor, and exist mainly by wage-labour on the rainfed 'schemes' and the illegal sale of wood.

Groups still moving as pastoralists are, almost be definition, better off, as without a certain amount of animal wealth there is no point in moving. Many groups appeared to have considerable herds, and some possessed other signs of wealth. Nevertheless, their position appears vulnerable, as they themselves are very aware. In every case pastoralists made heartfelt and articulate complaints about their 'oppressions' (mazlamin):

a) Their regular dry-season grazing lands and the routes to their rainy season pastures are being taken by tractorised 'schemes'.

b) Crop residues, a dry season fodder of increasing importance, especially since the drought, are now sold for huge sums (we were told up to £15,000/1000 feddans, though £3-4,000 was more usual), whereas before, either lands were uncultivated or animals were allowed onto the farm after the harvest. In some cases, farmers are burning stalks if animal owners refuse to buy them.

c) Some merchants and scheme owners (who may themselves be ex-pastoralists of other tribes) are maintaining their own livestock in the area, looked after by hired herders, which is further decreasing resources available to pastoralists.

d) There is unauthorised tree-cutting, particularly on the east bank of the Atbara, and forest is also being lost directly to mechanised agriculture.

e) Large tracts of country previously used by pastoralists are now rendered unusable by banditry, following the shift into this activity by many ex-Eritrean Liberation Front fighters. The Atbara above Safawa, and the Setit above Jeera have ceased to be dry season camps for pastoralists for this reason, and remaining stretches of river are becoming overcrowded.

f) Police and army give no support to pastoralists, it is claimed, in their problems with bandits, stock thieves and scheme owners.

g) Fellata and other non-Lahawi villagers have in some areas taken all available jerif land, and are restricting pastoral access to

the river (to water animals) to narrow paths, or charging for access to the river or other water.

The migratory patterns of Lahawin pastoralists, their own agricultural activity and the effects upon them of large-scale mechanised farming and the recent drought, all vary between different groups. Some further detail on Lahawin pastoralism, and its current situation, will be given for three areas.

IV CASE STUDIES

A) On the east bank of the Atbara, between Showak and the Khashm el Girba dam, there are three settled non-Lahawi villages, and a few camps of pastoral Rashaida, but the rest of the population, around 6000, is Lahawin. Some of the Lahawin groups are completely settled and have been for some time. The remaining communities either can be characterised as transhumant, or could be until the drought. Here, it would seem that of the Lahawi communities, as many or more have recently been forced to give up pastoral migration as still practise it. Pastoral migration here is evidence of greater viability than settlement. Settlement has been forced, immediately by extreme herd losses during the drought, but structurally by the loss of former dry-season pasture east of the river to mechanised 'schemes' that seem, in this area, to be wholly unofficial. The recently settled groups, though they generally have access to jerif, do not have sufficient rainland (held by customary tenure) to guarantee prosperity. These communities, and some stockless families among the transhumant communities, supplement their income by wage labour on the mechanised 'schemes' and by the illegal sale of wood. Labour migration to towns, even to nearby small towns such as Showak, appears to be insignificant. Ex-pastoralists say they have no skills to offer in towns. In one particularly extreme example, 70 families of Lahawin who had previously moved as pastoralists without cultivating at all, had lost their herds and been forced to settle as dependents of a Rashaida sheikh, weeding and harvesting on his 'schemes' and receiving handouts and small loans of land.

Even in the communities most committed to pastoralism, not everybody moves with the herds. Generally the extended family unit of father and married sons divides the tasks of herding and cultivation between them. The ideal pattern is for the father to stay in the dry season camp (which in this area will be a few hours from the fields) to cultivate during the rains, while one or more of the sons, taking their families with them, move north with the herds. Pregnant women and the sick will also stay behind. Families that do move with the herds leave their dry season camps in late July or August, for grazing areas to the north, particularly around Malawiya, between Girba and Kassala. The distance of pastoral migration varies according to the rain. In bad years pastoralists travel less far, e.g. to Khor Gergaf, than in good years. The herds return to the dry season camps in September or October and the next few months are the most difficult period. Camels browse off trees, and foliage is shaken down with sticks for smallstock, but animal owners complain that merchants and Rashaida are cutting down trees (the activities of their impoverished fellow-pastoralists are presumably also to blame). Animals also eat purchased grain during this period. After harvest, usually in March, animals can graze on crop-stalks, but right of access to harvested fields is sold to pastoralists for £3-4000/1000 feddans and sometimes for as much as £10,000. As there is now little other food for animals, market forces can push prices very high. Crop stalks are purchased collectively by a mashaikh, each man contributing according to his animal wealth. The same pattern, that animals graze on the rainlands, periodically watering on the river (smallstock every third day, camels every fifth) is still followed.

The Lahawin pastoralists on the east bank mainly possess some rainland under customary land tenure. The average cultivator may farm (by hired tractor) up to four hours (20 feddans) but this may be on behalf of an extended, rather than nuclear, family. Yield from this could be anything between 15-30 sacks of sorghum. The stalks from pastoralists' own cultivation will not feed their animals for any significant period. One extended family of a

sheikh and four married sons have 200 smallstock and 40 camels between them, but say the stalks from their twenty feddans joint cultivation will only feed these animals for a few days. As mentioned above, most pastoral families now need to sell considerable amounts of stock to support themselves and their herds.

Most of the Lahawin communities along the east bank possess jerif lands, which they cultivate during the dry season, but grow on them only watermelons, and in a few cases pumpkins.

B) The west bank of the Atbara, upstream of the confluence with the Setit, provides a contrast with the area just discussed in that Lahawi pastoralists make dry-season camps in among predominantly non-Lahawi villages. Pastoralists are under pressure here not only from extensive mechanised rainfed agriculture, but also from the intensification of agricultural production on the jerif lands by villagers. In addition, land available for dry-season grazing is shrinking because of bandit activity, the east bank upstream of the confluence (though this was never a major dry-season area for pastoralists) and the west bank upstream of Safawa all being unsafe.

Pastoral movements from this area are into the Butana around the inselbergs Jebels Kasamor and Nawasil and near the New Halfa Scheme, beginning in July and August and returning in October. Many, but not all of these groups, cultivate. Some have rainland near their dry season-camp, which is left as they move north with their animals, and there is one case of cultivation near the rainy-season pastures, on which the families remain throughout the winter with small milch herds, while the young men go ahead with the main herds. There are also cases of pastoralists cultivating rainy season pastures, but on land near the sedentary villages of close tribal relatives.

These pastoralists may spend the winter on or off the river, but by March they will all be camped along it, in relatively solid grass shelters. Their dry-season sites are customary, and claimed

as their own, but in many cases also claimed by villagers. The Atbara in this area is not rich in jerif, and the villagers have claimed what there is. In the dry-season, the pastoralists and their animals drink from the river (or from hand-dug wells next to it) but complain that the villagers are cultivating more and more of the jerif, protecting it with thorn fences, and leaving only a few narrow paths for pastoralists to water animals.

Pastoralists in this area share the same difficulties as others, including the encroachment of mechanised 'schemes' on dry-season pastures. The boundary of the demarcated Gabob scheme runs not far from the river here. Here as elsewhere, the major fodder at this time will be cropstalks, sesame as well as sorghum. Again this is sold for high prices, with the threat by scheme owners that they would rather burn it than sell it cheap. Some communities do pay for some transport of crop stalks to their camps, rather than taking their animals to the harvested fields.

On the upper Atbara as north of Showak, there are communities who have been forced to settle, facing the same uncertain future with a few smallstock, a small amount of arable land, and competing with refugees for wage-labour opportunities.

C) A final contrast is provided by the Gawaamis major lineage of the Lahawin. The whole lineage of nine mashaikh is transhumant, unlike the other lineages which include both transhumants and sedentary villagers. Gawaamis camps also range much further to the southwest than other Lahawin, even onto the Rahad river, and also claim never to have owned cattle, unlike other groups who say they lost their cattle recently. Most Gawaamis now camp in the dry-season around off-river well-centres, which is also atypical.

Five Gawaamis mashaikh, and families of two others, currently summer near Rashid, a large non-Lahawi agricultural village south of Gedaref. The mashaikh range from a 100 (nuclear) families to 700. They occupy these dry season camps from October to July, drinking from the wateryard in the village, or from a hafir, both for payment. Their tenure on this land is less regular and less

secure than that of other pastoralists on riverside lands. One of the camps we interviewed was coming to Rashid every year, but had only been doing so for the last seven years. Prior to that they had summered on the Atbara, but had switched due to banditry. Another camp had summered the previous year at Asar, another village with a wateryard, and before that on the Rahad. They complained that when they had arrived at Rashid, they had been told to leave. A third group were apparently taking the whole dry season, October to June, in a large forest near Showak town, drinking from hafirs and from the river. It is to be feared that difficulty of access to summer grazing may result in overuse of this forest, besides direct deforestation by mechanised agriculture. The Gawaamis do not cultivate at present, as they have no rainland by customary tenure, and have not succeeded in getting access to any other land.

Despite their landlessness and insecurity, the Gawaamis seemed comparatively well off, with large herds of camel. In the dry season camel and smallstock are herded in the country around Rashid by young men, drinking at the wateryard periodically. During this season milk may be sold, to lorries coming from Gedaref. In July, the whole camp and their herds move north. As more land has been cultivated, they have become restricted to a single narrow route to their rainy-season pastures, which may be around Jebel Nawasil, or areas nearer the New Halfa scheme.

V DISCUSSION

The encroachment on pastoralist grazing lands has been mentioned in various writings as one of many harmful consequences of the expansion of mechanised farming in the Sudan. The forced settlement of Lahawin pastoralists in areas where the resources for subsistence agriculture do not exist, and the insecurities voiced by Lahawin who remain pastoralists, are striking confirmation of this. Even if there is little evidence in this case for two of the consequences of pastoralist dispossession often mentioned, overgrazing of lands further north and an increase of outbreaks of violence, the most

important consequence, the reduction of pastoralists into impoverished rural wage-labourers, is clearly present. The drought has obviously acted as a proximate cause fof this long-term tendency. This is recognised by many of the ex-pastoralists, who have lost the wish to rebuild herds, faced with their new landlessness. The extension of alluvial peasant cultivation, and insecurity on the Sudan-Ethiopian border are also contributing causes.

Certain specific points should be made. Many Lahawin pastoralists remain superficially very prosperous. Communities summering on the Upper Atbara, the Setit and at Rashid retain large camel herds. This is not surprising: pastoralism will continue to be favoured by many Lahawin as a form of investment (particularly if they lack arable land or the connections to obtain it) and a sanctioned way of life. As the immediate pressures of drought on pastoralism act to remove poorer pastoralists from pastoralism, wealthy pastoralists will appear to be more the rule. This does not of course imply the long term viability of pastoralism if current trends continue.

One route pastoralism may take for a successful minority is that of increased monetisation. The present reliance of most groups on the purchase of crop stalks is one pointer to this, as is the example of the Rashaida. Rashaida adopted long-range, aterritorial camel pastoralism on their arrival in the Sudan in the nineteenth century, and have since diversified into trade, labour migration and mechanised agriculture (Young, 1986). They were therefore able to survive the present drought, and appear to be escaping the effects of the shortage of grazing land, possibly by the lorry transport of livestock between grazing locations.

Finally, although O'Brien and others tend to represent the extension of mechanised rainfed farming as inexorable, there are faint tendencies of opposition to it in certain sectors of government. If strong regional government reappears in Eastern Sudan it may be relatively more attentive to the needs of pastoralists than other sectors, though it will have virtually no direct authority over mechanised rainfed farming. Pastoralists may also find an unexpected

ally in the New Halfa Scheme management. Soil erosion associated with poor farming on the rainlands has caused heavy silting of the Girba reservoir and a great reduction in irrigated land. But mechanised farming is still a key aspect of Sudanese political economy; the prospects for pastoralism are still very bleak.

NOTES

The research on which this paper is based was carried out in March and April 1987 as part of a consultancy for the Save the Children Federation (USA) on the extension of a Primary Health Care programme to pastoralists; see Morton 1987 for further details.

(1) This description follows the work of J. O'Brien, particularly O'Brien 1983.

(2) 1 feddan = 1.039 acres.

(3) According to the classification of M.N. Harrison adopted by the Sudan Survey Department.

(4) Civsec 66/3/29 and other files in the National Records Office, Khartoum.

(5) For more information see Young 1986, or Morton 1987.

(6) The New Halfa Scheme was not visited by the author.

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