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Evidences of Sīrah Discussions in Fatwā Literature (A Critical Study of Al-Atāyā Al-Nabawiyyah fī -Al-Fatwā Al-Ridawiyyah)

مباحث السیرة فی الأدب الفتوى

(دراسة نقدية لكتاب: العطایۃ النبویۃ فی الفتاوی الرضویۃ)

Authors Details

1. Prof. Dr. Humayun Abbas (Corresponding Author)

Dean Faculty of Islamic and Oriental Learning, Govt. College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Email: drhumayunabbas@gcuf.edu.pk

2. Zabeh Ulllah

MPhil Scholar, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Govt. College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

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Evidences of Sīrah Discussions in Fatwā Literature (A Critical Study of Al-Atāyā Al-Nabawiyyah fī - Al-Fatwā Al-Riḍawiyyah)

مباحث السيرة في الأدب الفتوى

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☆ Prof. Dr. Humayun Abbas

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Abstract

Fiqh is not a new discipline; scholarly engagement with it began during the era of Khayr al-Qurūn (Early years of Islam). However, with the passage of time, it has continued to evolve, exhibiting increasing sophistication, originality, and refinement. A few centuries ago, this discipline took the form of Fatāwā compilations. Among the various collections of Fatāwā authored across different regions, languages and eras of the Muslim world, Fatāwā Ridawiyyah occupies a distinct and distinguished position among all. This monumental and phenomenal work stands out for the diversity of its subjects, the novelty of its evidentiary reasoning, the depth of its derivation, extrapolation of legal principles, implementations and its engagement with contemporary issues. Beyond its juristic mastery and superiority, it also embodies a profound and all-encompassing devotion to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Imam Ahmad Raza Khan's fervent expressions of love for the Prophet ﷺ in this collection and compilation of Fatāwā, and it is this very spiritual ardor that naturally leads to the inclusion of discussions pertaining to Sīrah (the life of the Prophet), happen to be the topic of this article.

Keywords: Sīrah, Imam Ahmad Raza Khan, Al-Fatwā al-Riḍawiyyah, Fatāwā compilations,

If one surveys the sources of the *Sīrat-Ul-Nabī* (Prophet's ﷺ biography), it becomes evident that there is hardly any dimension of the religious sciences or of human history from which the biographer does not derive some form of information. From ancient human history and revealed scriptures up to the present day, the sources may be classified under various categories. Yet, the primary distinction remains between foundational and supplementary sources, or between revealed texts and non-revealed works, which retain essential significance.

Within the religious sciences, the compilation of Fatāwā literature emerges in response to societal issues. The Muslim community seeks to illuminate these issues in the light of *Uswah-Tu-Al-Hasanah* (the Prophetic Model), while non-Muslim societies approach him as an embodiment of the “ideal human being”

☆ MPhil Scholar, Dept. of Islamic Studies, Govt. College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

☆ Dean Faculty of Islamic and Oriental Learning, Govt. College University, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

and thus seek guidance from that perspective. The former turns to the works of jurisprudence or to a jurist for solutions, whereas the latter endeavors to consult religious literature composed in its own language. In any case, the undeniable reality is this: wherever manifestations of human love and human welfare are discernible, they are not but reflections of the radiance of the Prophetic Model. The *fatāwā* possess an extensive history, having been compiled or commissioned by jurists across different regions and languages. These *fatāwā* are not merely repositories of juridical opinions; but also contain discussions of various dimensions related to the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Subjects such as *fiqh al-sīrah* (juridical approaches to the Prophet's life), the jurisprudential aspects of the *sīrah*, the wisdom and rulings embedded in the events of the *sīrah*, and the chronology of the *sīrah* are frequently addressed therein.

Among these works, out of those, is *Al-Atāyā Al-Nabawiyyah Fī- Al-Fatāwā al-Ridawiyah*, a compilation of the refined researches of Shaykh al-Islām Imām Ahmad Ridā.¹ From the perspective of *Sīrah* studies, a study of this collection reveals, alongside a vast array of “incidents of the *sīrah*,” a precious reservoir of materials pertaining to the “subjects of the *Sīrah*”. When approached specifically from the standpoint of *Sīrah* scholarship, the following dimensions emerge from this compendium:

1. Treatises which were originally composed as responses to specific queries but subsequently took shape as independent works on the *Sīrah*.
2. *Uṣūl al-sīrah* (The principles of *sīrah*.)
3. *Tawqīt* (The chronology of the *sīrah*)
4. *Asma-ul-nabi* (The names of the Prophet).
5. *Dalāil ul-na-buwwah* (The proofs of Prophethood).
6. References to the classical works on *Sīrah*.
7. Mention of the leading authorities of *Sīrah* and history.
8. The spiritual and mystical dimensions of the *Sīrah*.
9. Critical evaluation of transmitted reports.

In the present article, a selection of illustrative examples related to these themes is presented.

1. Independent Treatises on the *Sīrah* and its Related Dimensions

The following treatises have been written on various aspects of the Prophet's ﷺ life and *Sīrah* scholarship. The significance of these works lies not only in their literary value but also in the symbolic meanings associated with them in the *Ilm al-adād* (science of numerology). Moreover, from the perspective of “*sīrah mawdū 'iyyah*” (thematic *sīrah* studies), they embody a remarkable comprehensiveness.

1. *Al-Zahr al-Bāsim fī Hurmat al-Zakāh 'alā Banī Hāshim* (Vol. 10, p. 271)

¹. Numerous books and scholarly dissertations have been written on his life and scholarly contributions. For detailed information about his biography, refer to Professor Dr. Muhammad Masood Ahmad's book “*Hayat-e-Maulana Ahmad Raza Khan Barevi*”.

2. Nutq al-Hilāl bi-Arkh Wilādat al-Ḥabīb wa'l-Wiṣāl (Vol. 26, p. 405)
3. Khāliṣ al-I'tiqād with Tamhīd Rimāḥ al-Qahhār 'alā Kufr al-Kuffār (Vol. 29, p. 10)
4. Anbā' al-Muṣṭafā bi-Ḥāl al-Sirr wa'l-Akhfā (Vol. 29, p. 10)
5. Anwār al-Intibāh fī Ḥall Nidā' Yā Rasūl Allāh (Vol. 29, p. 10)
6. Sharḥ al-Maṭālib fī Mabḥath Abī Ṭālib (Vol. 29, p. 10)
7. I'tiqād al-Āḥbāb fī al-Jamīl wa'l-Muṣṭafā wa'l-Āl wa'l-Āshāb (Vol. 29, p. 10)
8. Asmā' al-Arba'īn fī Shafā'at Sayyid al-Mahbūbīn (Vol. 29, p. 10)
9. Tajallī al-Yaqīn bi-anna Nabīyinā Sayyid al-Mursalīn (Vol. 30, p. 9)
10. Shumūl al-Islām li-Uṣūl al-Rusul al-Kirām (Vol. 30, p. 9)
11. Tamhīd Īmān bi-Āyāt al-Qur'ān (Vol. 30, p. 9)
12. Al-Amn wa'l-'Alā lanā 'Atā' al-Muṣṭafā bi-Dāfi' al-Balā' (Vol. 30, p. 9)
13. Muniyyat al-Labīb anna al-Tashrī' bi-Yad al-Ḥabīb (Vol. 30, p. 10)
14. Munabbih al-Muniyyah bi-Wuṣūl al-Ḥabīb ilā al-'Arsh wa'l-Ru'yah (Vol. 30, p. 10)
15. Ṣalāt al-Ṣafā fī Nūr al-Muṣṭafā (Vol. 30, p. 10)
16. Nafy al-Fay' 'amman Istānār bi-Nūrihī Kullu Shay' (Vol. 30, p. 10)
17. Qamar al-Tamām fī Nafy al-Zill 'an Sayyid al-Anām (Vol. 30, p. 10)
18. Hudā al-Ḥayrān fī Nafy al-Fay' 'an Sayyid al-Akwān (Vol. 30, p. 10)
19. Shifā' al-Wālih fī Ṣuwar al-Ḥabīb wa-Mazārih wa-Nā'ālihi (Vol. 21, p. 9)
20. Fiqh Shāhinshāh wa-anna al-Qulūb bi-Yad al-Mahbūb bi-'Atā' Allāh (Vol. 21, p. 10)
21. Al-Baḥth al-Fāhiṣ 'an Ṭuruq Ahādīth al-Khaṣā'is (Vol. 22, p. 213 / Vol. 30, p. 249)

These various treatises are a clear manifestation of the thematic tendency in Sīrah studies. *Asmā' al-Arba'īn fī Shafā'at Sayyid al-Mahbūbīn* stands as an excellent example of this trend.

2. Uṣūl al-Sīrah (Principles of Sīrah Writing)

The domain of *Uṣūl al-Sīrah* (principles of *Sīrah* writing) has often remained neglected, since the study of the *Sīrah* was generally pursued under the disciplines of *Hadīth* or History. It was only in the twenty-first century that focused attention was directed to this dimension, leading to scholarly articles on the subject. On this basis, attempts were made to divide the *Sīrah* into "authentic" and "weak" categories, though such a trend is not entirely appropriate. Subsequently, different modes of *muḥaddith*-style of *Sīrah* writing emerged, including hybrid methods combining *Hadīth* and Historical approaches, chapter arrangements modeled on the *muḥaddithūn*, and separate works categorizing authentic and weak reports. These phenomena reflect, in some form, an engagement with the principles of *Sīrah*, though much more scholarly work remains to be done. Within *Fatāwā Ridāwiyyah*, one may

identify several precedents related to *Uṣūl Ul-Sīrah*. A few notable examples are as follows:

The use of juristic principles for chronological matters:

It reads:

“In the Sacred Law, that which is well-known and accepted by the majority holds great weight and among the majority, the 12th of Rabī’ al-Awwal is recognised.”²

He says:

“After the Noble Prophet ﷺ, it is not possible for all sciences to be gathered in a single individual”³

He writes:

“In reality, in every perfection, whether general or specific, the Prophet ﷺ holds absolute and universal superiority over all the Messengers and the entirety of creation”⁴

“Every good is a gift from the Prophet ﷺ.” (wa-kullu khayrin min ‘aṭā’ al-Muṣṭafā).⁵

On the study of miracles and the critique of reports:

“Once we have accepted a transmitter as trustworthy and reliable, and when the occurrence of such a miracle or the attribution of such a special quality to the Noble Prophet ﷺ is not impossible given that far greater miracles are established from him through recurrent transmission, that his Lord is fully capable of more, that better distinctions are certainly prepared for him, and that his rank is loftier than all then what basis is there for denial? From this reasoning, the principle is derived that when miracles are established through authentic reports, miracles narrated in weaker reports may also be accepted.”⁶

“The fact that Isā (peace be upon him) is considered a follower of the Prophet ﷺ does not contradict his own Prophethood.”⁷

Says: “Showing reverence for anything associated with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is, in essence, reverence for the Messenger himself.”⁸

3. *Tawqīt* (Chronology)

One of the more challenging aspects of *Sīrah* scholarship lies in reconciling chronological discrepancies. The author of *Fatāwā* was also well-versed in

². Barelvī, Ahmad Raḍā, Imām. *Fatāwā Radawiyyah*. Lāhore: Raḍā Fā’ūndēshan, 2006, V: 26, P: 427

³. IBID, V: 23, P: 662

⁴. IBID, V: 22, P: 614

⁵. IBID, V: 03, P: 208

⁶. IBID, V: 30, P: 719

⁷. IBID, V: 29, P: 111

⁸. IBID, V: 21, P: 03-04

astronomy and cosmology, and thus presented his research on certain chronological questions in a scholarly manner.

In Nutq al-Hilāl bār Kh Wīlād al-Ḥabīb wa-al-Wiṣāl (“The Testimony of the Crescent concerning the Birth and Passing of the Beloved of God ﷺ”), he shed light on the month and date of the Prophet’s blessed birth on the basis of historical and Sīrah works as well as astronomical calculations

Regarding the month, he writes:

“Rajjab, Ṣafar, Rabī‘ al-Awwal, Muḥarram, and Ramaḍān have all been mentioned, but the sound and widely accepted opinion of the majority is Rabī‘ al-Awwal”⁹

Regarding the date, he observes:

“The inquirer has raised a question concerning the exact date, and the opinions vary greatly: the 2nd, 8th, 10th, 12th, 17th, 18th, and 22nd have all been mentioned. Yet the most renowned, most common, and most reliable is the 12th”¹⁰

From the standpoint of astronomy, he notes:

“According to astronomical and calendrical calculations, the day of the noble birth falls on the 8th of Rabī‘ al-Awwal”¹¹

And further, he remarks:

“What Shiblī and others have written, assigning the 9th of Rabī‘ al-Awwal, is correct by no reckoning whatsoever”¹²

Similarly, his investigation into the day of the Prophet’s *Hijrat al-Wadā‘* (Farewell Pilgrimage) is also noteworthy, discussed incidentally in the context of a juridical issue. He established it as 6 March 632 CE / 9 Dhū al-Hijjah 10 AH.¹³

4. Asma-ul-nabi ﷺ (The names of the Prophet).

A most beautiful chapter of the Sīrah lies in the collection of the Blessed Names of the Prophet ﷺ. Concerning this, the Fatwā contains the following statement:

“The Names of Allah are beyond enumeration, for His attributes are limitless. In like manner, the pure Names of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ are exceedingly numerous, for the abundance of Names arises from the honor of the Named One. In al-Mawāhib and its commentary more than eight hundred are mentioned, while this humble servant has found nearly fourteen hundred enumeration is impossible.”¹⁴

⁹. IBID, V: 26, P: 408

¹⁰. IBID, V: 26, P: 411

¹¹. IBID, V: 26, P: 427

¹². IBID

¹³. IBID, V: 20, P: 575

¹⁴. IBID, V: 28, P: 365-366

Elsewhere it is noted that Allah Most High granted His own Names to His noble prophets, some receiving one, others two.

“But in the case of our Radiant Master, the Leader of the Worlds ﷺ, more than sixty of the Divine Names are found among his noble Names.”¹⁵

5. **Dalā’il al-Nubuwwah (Proofs of Prophethood)**

In volume 22, narrations concerning miracles are cited at various places, yet always through the jurist’s distinctive method of legal inference. For example, in *Ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the miracle of the repayment of Jābir’s debt is mentioned, but the actual objective is to discuss the different forms of circumambulation (tawāf). From the words *fa-tāfa ḥawla a’zamihā* in this report, the point of juridical inference was drawn.¹⁶ Similarly, he writes:

*“The Imams and scholars have authored various *chehl hadīth* collections. By the grace of Allah, here we shall compile a *chehl hadīth* on the prohibition of prostration to other than God.”¹⁷*

After this, narrations of miracles are transmitted.¹⁸

Regarding the incident of Ustun Ḥannānah (the weeping date-palm trunk), when asked whether it was buried and a funeral prayer offered for it, he replied: “To perform a funeral prayer over it is incorrect. As for its being buried beneath the Noble Pulpit, that is indeed mentioned in one report.”¹⁹

6. **Remembrance of *Sīrah* Works**

Although the primary subject of *fatāwā* is juridical issues, within the *Fatāwā Ridawiyyah* one frequently finds deliberate opportunities created for the remembrance of the *Sīrah*. Whether in the context of particular events from the Prophet’s ﷺ life or in reference to works of *Sīrah*, these mentions appear repeatedly, even when not strictly required by the legal discussion at hand. Various stylistic approaches may be noted in this regard:

For example:

*“Allāmah Husayn ibn Muhammad al-Diyārbakrī, in his *Kitāb al-Khamīs fī Aḥwāl Anfus Nafīs* ﷺ, in the fourth section entitled that which is particular to the Prophet ﷺ among his miracles, states ...”²⁰*

Elsewhere, he highlights the stature of Imām al-Suyūṭī and discusses the type of works in which references ought to be drawn. From the passage it also becomes

¹⁵ . IBID, V: 24, P: 696

¹⁶ . IBID, V: 22, P:388

¹⁷ . IBID, V: 02, P:437

¹⁸ . IBID, V: 02, P:438-446

¹⁹ . IBID, V: 19, P:426

²⁰ . IBID, V: 20, P: 702

clear that, for purposes of citation, not only *Bukhārī* and *Muslim* are of value, but other works are also worthy of scholarly consideration. For instance:

“Imām-al-Suyūtī a Hadīth master of vast vision, who with determined resolve set out to collect and encompass all transmitted reports in Jam-al-Jawāmi did not find the chain of transmission for the Hadīth ‘The disagreement of my community is a mercy.’ In his Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaghīr he merely remarked that perhaps it is narrated in a book that has not reached us. Later, however, ‘Allāmah al-Manāwī, in his Taysīr, traced it to al-Madkhal of al-Bayhaqī and Firdaws of al-Daylamī. Thus, how could one of such meager ability as myself dare to make a claim? Yet would you then disregard the compositions of Imām Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak, the works of Hāfiẓ Razīn, Kitāb al-Wafā of Allāmah al-Jawzī, Shifā al-Ṣudūr of Allāmah Ibn Sab, al-Shifā fī Tarīf Huqūq al-Muṣṭafā by Qādī ‘Iyād, Nasīm al-Riyād by al-Khafājī, al-Khaṣāiṣ Ul-Kubrā by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūtī, al-Mawāhib Ul-Ladunniyyah and al-Mināh al-Muḥammadiyyah by Imām al-Qastallānī, their commentary by al-Zurqānī, Madārij al-Nubuwwah by al-Shaykh al-Muhaqqiq, and many other Imams of religion and the scholars of verification merely because the issue is not mentioned in Bukhārī or Muslim?”²¹

Moreover, he cites important Sīrah works such as al-Rawd al-Unuf, al-Sīrah al-Halabiyyah, and al-Sīrah al-Shāmiyyah.²²

Likewise, reference works on the *Nalayn al-Nabawi*(the Prophet’s ﷺ blessed sandal) are also noted.²³

The purpose of this style is twofold: to draw the reader’s attention toward deeper study, and to substantiate one’s own position through the abundance of authoritative references.

7. Mention of the Imams of Sīrah and History

A biographer of the Prophet ﷺ must necessarily keep before him the foundational sources and the great authorities of the discipline, in order to discern from whom and in what manner narrations are to be drawn. Consider, for instance, the perspective on Imām al-Wāqidī:

“Imām al-Wāqidī is deemed trustworthy (thiqah) by our scholars. Although the majority of the traditionists have spoken critically of him the details of which are recorded in works such as Mīzān and others of the discipline hence in al-Taqrīb he is described as ‘abandoned despite his vast

²¹ . IBID, V: 30, P:744-745

²² . IBID, V: 30, P:764

²³ . IBID, V: 21, P:424-458

knowledge.' Nevertheless, according to our scholars, the stronger position is his authentication, as affirmed by the Imām al-Muhaqqiq in *Fath al-Qadīr*. Even those who accept the severe criticisms still recognize him as an authority in *siyar*, *maghāzī*, and historical reports, and the narrations of *sīrah* from him are cited continuously by both earlier and later scholars, as is evident to anyone familiar with the works of the learned. In *Mīzān* it is stated: he was an expert and memorizer in reports and traditions, the knowledge of *sīrah* and *maghāzī*, the events of time and its history, as well as jurisprudence and other fields.”²⁴

Elsewhere, the background is also illuminated as to why al-Wāqidī came to be censured.²⁵

It should be noted that Shibli's *Sīrah* writing rests upon the rejection of al-Wāqidī, yet he readily accepts the narrations of Ibn Sa'd. On this point, Dr. Zafar Ahmad's work *Mawlānā Shibli Nu'mānī ba-ḥaythiyyat Sīrat Nigar*²⁶ is well worth study. Similarly, a critical analysis of Ibn Ishāq's authentication is presented, affirming him to be a reliable authority.²⁷

Regarding al-Tabarī, it is noted that two individuals bore this name: one, a commentator, Hadīth scholar, Sunnī, and Shāfiī in madhhab, whose *Tārīkh Kabīr* is extremely rare and invaluable.²⁸

At the same juncture, a most insightful remark is made concerning historical works in general:

“Whatever may be the authorship of a historical work, it can never be the basis of creed. Historians record the sound and the unsound, the connected and the disconnected, the incomplete and the problematic they include all kinds of material.”²⁹

8. The Mystical Dimensions of the *Sīrah*

Shaykh Aḥmad Rīḍā was a great Ṣūfī of the Qādirī order. Within *Fatāwā Rīḍawiyyah* one finds numerous treatises on Sufism, along with extensive discussions on mystical doctrines. In this connection, he also shed light on the spiritual dimensions of the Prophet's ﷺ *Sīrah*.

Citing *al-Khaṣā'is Ul-Kubrā*, he writes:

“It was for the Prophet ﷺ alone that both *Shari'ah* and *Haqīqah* were combined. None of the other noble prophets bore both qualities together; rather, each was characterized

²⁴ . IBID, V: 05, P:526-527

²⁵ . IBID, V: 23, P:663

²⁶ . The contradictions of Allama Shibli are mentioned in this book that was published by “Kitab Sarae” in 2005.

²⁷ . IBID, V: 28, P:66

²⁸ . IBID, V: 26, P:429

²⁹ . IBID, V: 26, P:429

by only one. The story of Mūsā and Khidr is evidence of this.”³⁰

A few pages earlier, he notes:

“Allah made our Beloved ﷺ a ruler over both Sharī‘ah and ḥaqīqah. His judgments sometimes pertained to the outward law (sharī‘ah ẓāhirah) and at other times to the inward reality (ḥaqīqah bātinah).”³¹

He also wrote concerning the doctrine of *al-Haqīqah al-Muhammadiyyah*.³²

Equally profound is his treatment of the sources of the Prophet’s ﷺ biography. In *Tamhīd al-Īmān bi-Āyāt al-Qur’ān*, the Qur’ān is presented as the foundational source of the *sīrah*.³³ From this work we may observe how chapters of the *Sīrah* unfold directly from the Qur’ān. For instance:

“In *Sūrat al-Fātiḥah* there is explicit praise of the Prophet ﷺ: *al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* refers to Muḥammad ﷺ. As for his Companions, Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, they are among those ‘upon whom favor has been bestowed’ (an‘amta ‘alayhim). The leaders of the four groups are the prophets, and the leader of all the prophets is Muṣṭafā ﷺ. Al-Shaykh al-Muhaqqiq, in *Akhbār al-Akhyār*, transmitted a *tafsīr* in which every verse of the Qur’ān is presented as a blessing including *Sūrat al-Ikhlas*. ”³⁴

Beyond these aspects, other significant insights on the *Sīrah* and its writing are also present within *Fatāwā Ridawiyyah*. For example:

He translated and annotated the work of Mawlānā Sayyid Husayn ibn Ṣāliḥ (d. 1301 AH), al-Nīrah al-Wādiyyah Sharḥ Jawharat al-Muḍīyyah, under the title *al-Turrah al-Ridīyyah alā al-Nīrah al-Wādiyyah*. One of its chapters, entitled *al-Ziyārah*, contains valuable material on visitation of Al-Rawḍah al-Āṭhar (the Noble Tomb).³⁵

In the same volume, the section *Faṣl Hāftum: Presence before the Supreme Master in Madīnah al-Tayyibah*, the Beloved of Allah ﷺ also constitutes a chapter of *Sīrah*.

Conclusion:

It is evident that throughout the *fatāwā*, while discussing juridical issues, references to the *Sīrah* appear incidentally, frequently, yet meaningfully. In sum, these examples demonstrate that within the literature of *fatāwā* one can discover a vast reservoir of materials, indications, and precedents pertaining to

³⁰ . IBID, V: 29, P:532

³¹ . IBID, V: 29, P:529

³² . IBID, V: 30, P:84

³³ . IBID, V: 30, P:308-358

³⁴ . IBID, V: 28, P:366

³⁵ . IBID, V: 10, P:798-812

the *Sīrah* of the Prophet ﷺ. *Fatāwā Raḍawiyah* Is one of the nest example to start with. It is one of the best collection of Sirah works, citing incidents of prophetic life and showing love for him and pave a way for readers to get light.



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