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A comprehensive review on the phytochemistry and pharmacodynamics of *Alstonia scholaris* (L.) R. Br.

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ABSTRACT

Alstonia scholaris (L.) R. Br., a tropical plant belonging to Apocynaceae family had been a fruitful traditional medicine in ayurveda and was used in several ailments. Alstonia scholaris is rich in phytochemicals like alkaloids, terpenoids, flavonoids, iridoids and essential oils. These phytochemicals are isolated from roots, stem, bark, fruits, flowers and leaves of *Alstonia scholaris*. The pharmacological aspect of *Alstonia scholaris* shows its greater potential in treatment of bacterial and viral infection, inflammatory diseases, ulcers, rheumatism, diarrhoea, hyperuricemia, diabetes, malaria, neural and cardiovascular diseases. Apart from these, *Alstonia scholaris* have been found to show antioxidant, immunomodulatory, antidepressant, analgesic and anticancer properties including cytotoxicity against various cancers in vitro and in vivo conditions. However, even after showing such pharmacological relevance, the clinical and pre-clinical studies of *Alstonia scholaris* and its requisite in further research, so that it can be used as a therapeutic drug in near future.

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1. Introduction

The role of medicinal plants in traditional medicine and also as raw material in pharmaceutics has been unimaginable. Considering its vast extension, the use of therapeutic plants has been increasing all over the world. The World Health Organizations report states that at least 70% of Indians are regularly using therapeutic plants as traditional medicines for treating several diseases (WHO, 2019). The therapeutic plants have been fundamental to the Indian ethnomedinicity- Ayurveda, Sidha, Unani and Tibetan medicine, as well as other folk medicines. One such medicinal plant, Alstonia scholaris (L.) R. Br. (A. scholaris) has been known for its conventional uses and excellent pharmacological relevance. A. scholaris is an tropical evergreen tree belonging to the family of Dogbanes (Apocynaceae) having white coloured perfumed flowers (El-Fiki et al., 2019). Commonly known the Devil's plant or Blackboard tree, A. scholaris was initially named as Echites scholaris. Later in 1811, Robert Brown renamed the genus

name to *Alstonia* to honour Prof. Charles Alston (Oktavia *et al.*, 2020). The species name scholaris was kept due to its importance in scholastics as it was used to make blackboards in school (Pandey *et al.*, 2020). The other names of *A. scholaris* are Saptaparna, Chatian, Milk wood, Phalagaruda and also known in various names as listed in Table 1 (Oktavia *et al.*, 2020).

2. Morphology and geographical distribution

A. scholaris is an epiphyte with a maximum height of 60 m having greyish brown rough bark, white milky latex, and rooting branches. The tree is rounded in shape with 4-8 whorled dense leaves. The leaves are dark green, thick, obovate to oblanceolate and narrow at the base, while the flowers are greenish white coloured, compact, umbel shaped, numerous and well scented (Figure 1). The flowering of *A. scholaris* in India is during December to March and fruiting is during May to July (Majid and Faraj, 2023). *A. scholaris* is found throughout in India, Sri-Lanka through mainland

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South-East Asia including Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Southern China, Indonesia, Malaysia throughout Myanmar to northern Australia and Ocenia Islands (Mahar *et al.*, 2022). It grows in evergreen as well as deciduous forests and even in plains. It can be cultivated in all climatic conditions of India, from tropical to sub-tropical regions with healthy growth at an annual rainfall of 100 to 150 cm, as it favours humid atmosphere (Tripathy *et al.*, 2019). *A. scholaris* flourishes well in red and black alluvial soil while it slugs down in rainy season due to wet soil condition (Bhandary, 2020).

3. Ethnomedical uses

The therapeutic application *A. sholaris* has been well mentioned by the name Saptaparna in the Ayurvedic text "Bhavaprakasha" which was earlier use to cure asthma, bleeding leprosy, phantom tumour, ulcers and gastric issues (Oktavia *et al.*, 2020). It also played vital role in the treatment of rheumatism, wounds, malaria, diabetes, cholera and dysentery. Moreover, *A. sholaris* was used an antipyretic and anthelmintic agent, along with major roles in stomach ache, hepatic diseases, skin rashes, swelling and urinary tract infection (Chhajed *et al.*, 2023). In the Yunnan province of China, *A. scholaris* was known as "Dai" which is used for the treatment of respiratory tract infection (Zhao *et al.*, 2021).

4. Phytochemistry

A. scholaris has been the interest of researchers due to its multi-therapeutic applications as it has rich phytochemical constituents. All the parts of the A. scholaris (roots, bark, leaves, stem, fruit and flower) have been chemically investigated by several researchers and found to be identified with flavonoids, alkaloids, iridoids, tannins and steroids (Ali et al., 2021). Some other chemical constituents which were reported in A. scholaris includes coumarins, terpenoids, phlobatanins, saponins, simple phenolics, primary metabolites and secondary metabolites (Ali et al., 2020). Till now more than 400 phytochemical constituents have been isolated and characterized from A. scholaris (Baliga, 2012). Majority of the constituents include alkaloids that are isolated from all parts of A. scholaris like roots, stem, bark, leaves flower and even fruits (Zhao et al., 2021) (Table 2). However, out of all the constituents of A. scholaris, few have been found to be very important in terms of therapeutic properties (Figure 2).

5. Pharmacodynamics

5.1. Antimicrobial activity

Macabeo and others reported that the methanol extract of *A. scholaris's* leaves, stem and root bark had an antimycobacterial effect. Using the Microplate Alamar Blue Assay (MABA) at a concentration of 50 g/mL, in-vitro antituberculosis activity inhibits about 89% of Mvcobacterium tuberculosis H37Rv (Tripathi et al., 2019). This study was conducted to confirm the role of butanol bark extracts in Mycobacterium tuberculosis (Zhao et al., 2021). The Luciferase reporter phage (LRP) and an in-vitro assay based upon inactivation of viability by a modus operandi similar to the neutralization assay were used to report the inhibition of Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Following six days of incubation, when the butanolic extract was given, the in-vitro bioassay results showed comprehensive susceptibility to the rapid expansion species of Mycobacterium as in contrast to control (Goel et al., 2021). Another study reported that bark and leaf extract of A. scholaris shows ant-microbial activity against various pathogens of human (Bagheri et al., 2020). Alstoscholarisine K, an indole isolated from gall-modulated leaves of A. scholaris has potent anti-microbial activity (Yu, 2021). Leaf extracts of A. scholaris also exhibits potent activity towards multi-resistant fungal and bacterial strains (Altaf et al., 2019).

5.2. Antioxidant activity

A lot of investigations have been done on the phytochemical analysis and antioxidant activities of *A. scholaris*. The study discovered that, in comparison to butanolic and ethyl acetate extracts, aqueous bark extracts had the antioxidant activity at the peak level in DPPH and ABTS assays (Goel *et al.*, 2021). Antioxidant property of *A. scholaris* will help human being to fight against various disease and stay young and healthy for longer period. But this important property of *A. scholaris* is not known very well till now. So, this property of *A. scholaris* needs more investigation to help human beings with a better option with no side effects.

5.3. Anti-inflammatory, Analgesic, anti-ulcerogenic and anti-rheumatoid activity

It has been reported the antinociceptive and antiinflammatory characteristics in A. scholaris by various scholars. According to the study, ethanolic extract significantly affects hot plate techniques and lessens the inflammatory response in inflammation induced by carrageenan (Sultana *et al.*, 2020). There was a noticeable antiulcerogenic effect of the ethanolic extracts. The leaves of A. scholaris are said to possess antioxidant and antiarthritic qualities by researchers. The results of this research indicate that ethanolic extracts have potent antiarthritic qualities, which may be related to their antioxidant, analgesic, anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive characteristics (Khyade *et al.*, 2014).

Another study has demonstrated the analgesic, antiinflammatory and antiulcerogenic qualities of A. scholaris fractions. The investigation concluded that although the DCM fraction lacked ulcerogenic properties, it did possess peripheral anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties. The effects of the ethyl acetate fractions were negligible (Banik and Das, 2023). In a study, the anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties of A. scholaris has been shown. The authors concluded that the three main alkaloids found in A. scholaris leaves-picrinine (Figure 2), vallesamine and scholaricine might have some kind of analgesic and antiinflammatory effect that acts peripherally (Zhan et al., 2023). In this investigation, the conventional mechanism behind the anti-complementary action of stem bark extracts was demonstrated in in-vitro condition. Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis may be benefited from the anticomplementary action of A. scholaris (Kanase and Mane, 2018).

5.4. Anti-viral activity

Researches have shown that A. scholaris exhibits potent activity against various viruses. According to a study, the total alkaloid (TA) of A. scholaris markedly decreased the production of cytokines and chemokines at the levels of mRNA and protein and significantly blocks replication of virus in A549 cells and U937-derived macrophages (Zhou et al., 2020). Moreover, in A549 cells, TA inhibited the activation of signal transduction triggered by type I interferons (IFN) and pattern recognition receptor (PRR). Crucially, in a deadly PR8 mouse model, TA also improved lung histopathology, decreased viral titer, inhibited the production of proinflammatory cytokines and innate immune cell infiltration and raised the survival rate (Zhou et al., 2020). Moreover, it was found that A. scholaris exhibits potent preventive activity against infection of SARS-CoV-2 in Hamster Model of Syrian (Rizvi et al., 2023). More studied needed in this field for better therapeutic option.

5.5. Anti-diarrheal activity

A. Scholaris has been shown to have anti-diarrheal properties by several researchers. According to a study, the methanolic crude extract of *A. scholaris* exhibits spasmolytic and anti-diarrheal properties via blocking the calcium channel (Shah *et al.*, 2010). The results of this research indicate that the anti-diarrheal and spasmolytic effects of *A. scholaris* crude extract may be because of the existence of a compound resembling CCB (Oktavia *et al.*, 2020). The anti-diarrheal characteristics of *A. scholaris* is not well known by now, further investigations are required to see its therapeutic effect in diarrhoea.

5.6. Anti-hyperuricemia

Some studies have revealed that *A. scholaris* also exhibits potent anti-hyperuricemia activity. Interestingly it lowers the levels of serum uric acid in models of mice at the concentration of 100 mg/kg and 200 mg/kg (Hu, 2023). Additionally, it shows better activity in HK-2 cell model enhanced by monosodium urate by enhancing the excretion of uric acid at the dose of 5μ M (Hu *et al.*, 2022). Scaffolds triterpenoids extracted from leaves of *A. scholaris* shows anti-hyperuricemic properties in both in-vitro and in-vivo condition (Hu, 2021). There is less research data about the anti-hyperuricemia activity of *A. scholaris* till now, so more research is needed in this area.

5.7. Anti-nociceptive activity

It has been reported that some plants have the potent activity against either nootropic mode or stress but A. scholaris is one of these plants having such both activities at a time. Methanol bark extract of this plant exhibits both these properties whereas the leaves ethanol extract possesses anti-anxiety activity without having any sedative or stimulant effects (Khyade et al., 2014). A clinical study taking about 30 patients was also conducted to check the effects of A. scholaris on hypertension and in result it was found that it potently reduces the both the systolic and diastolic blood pressure and symptoms of psychological disorders (Khyade et al., 2014). Now-a-days human beings are suffering from diseases related to CNSs and there are limited therapeutic options with higher side effects are available for it. Henceforth, in depth invention of antinociceptive property of A. scholaris will help human being significantly with less/no side effects.

5.8 Anti-malarial activity

Like other plants *A. scholaris* also has the potent killing activity against malarial parasite *Plasmodium*. Although this study is limited but some are reported. Mostly the bark and leaf extract show potent activity against *P. falciparum*. More specifically the methanol extract of bark shows promising anti-plasmodial activity in comparison to others (Singh *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, not enough data has been reported about the anti-malarial activity of *A. scholaris*. Hence more researches are needed in this field to get an ideal anti-malaria agent using different extracts of *A. scholaris*.

5.9. Antidepressant

A study on antidepression provided an account of *A*. *scholaris*'s impact on stress and cognitive function in mice. After applying the methanolic bark extracts, they found that

all the stress-induced markers—cortisol, glucose, protein, triglycerides, and cholesterol are normalized (Sarkar *et al.*, 2021). As in current scenario antidepressant therapeutics seeks more attention so in depth study about the antidepressant property of *A. scholaris*, which will help a lot to us.

5.10. Anti-diabetic

The potential for hypoglycemia of A. scholaris triterpenes was investigated and documented in a study. The authors found lupeol and betulin (Figure 2) to have hypoglycemic action. Another study reported A. scholaris Linn. bark's hypoglycemic activity and antihyperlipidemic effects in diabetic rats produced by streptozotocin (Chhajed et al., 2023). Because of its antidiabetic and antihyperlipidemic activity, the research revealed that the bark of A. scholaris has potential effects on lipid profile and may be useful in treating diabetes and related cardiovascular problems (Kanase and Mane, 2018). The antihyperlipidemic and antidiabetic properties of A. scholaris leaves were demonstrated by researchers. The study found that in diabetic rats produced by streptozotocin, the ethanolic extract of A. scholaris exhibited antihyperlipidemic and antioxidant potential in addition to its antidiabetic effect. Dita was the source of α -glucosidase blockers, as described by the study. It has been reported that an aqueous methanol extract from dried Devil tree leaves exhibits α-glucosidase inhibitory action (Oktavia et al., 2020). In detailed study will give a new therapeutic agent using different extracts of A. scholaris in the field of diabetics.

5.11. Anti-bacterial activity

Rapid centrifugal chromatography was used in the preliminary isolation of the bioactivator Logenetin from *A. scholaris*, as described by a study. The authors discussed the separation of logenetin and how it combats both grampositive and gram-negative bacteria (Qin *et al.*, 2015). Wang *et al.* claim that *A. scholaris* and *Leea tetramera* possess antibacterial qualities. They concluded that *A. scholaris* and *Leea tetramera* is root bark sections were useless against the fungi they looked at (Wang *et al.*, 2016). However no sufficient data is available till now related to anti-bacterial activity of *A. scholaris*, so in detail study in this area will give new insight into this field.

5.12. Immunomodulatory activity

The medicinal plants show their medicinal property by acting on the immune system of host. Like others *A*. *scholaris* also exhibits significant immunomodulatory role by acting differentially on the immune system of host. Research has been shown that the combination of alkaloid and triterpenes of *A. scholaris* enhances immunomodulatory action in C57BL/6 mice (Al-Rikabi, 2020). Its bark extract also has an immunomodulatory effect. At lower dose the aqueous extract promotes the cellular immunity while at higher dose it apprehends hypersensitivity reactions (Dangi *et al.*, 2018). In depth research regarding this subject will be benefited to mankind in future to boost immunity.

5.13. Anti-cancer and cytotoxic activity

Cancer is the first line disease in world today. Instead of having many treatment options its cure rate is still in worst condition. This is for therapy resistance and higher side effects. So, to overcome this situation now researchers are emphasizing on plant-based therapies as they have various pharmacological activities including anti-cancer activity and less/no side effects. Like other plants A. scholaris also exhibits potent cytotoxicity and anti-cancer activity against various cancers in both in-vitro and in-vivo conditions. It has also the ability of chemosensitization. It has been reported that triterpenoids and sterols isolated from leaf of the A. scholaris shows potent anti-proliferative activity against NSCLC (Wang, 2017). Additionally, normonoterpenoid indole alkaloids from fruit of A. scholaris potently kills the stem cells of glioblastoma (Wang, 2018). Alstoniasidines A (1) and B (2) isolated from A. scholaris shows cytotoxicity against stem cells of glioma by promoting caspase-3 mediated extrinsic pathway through enhancing the levels of expression of tumor necrosis factor/TNF- α , interleukin 1/IL-1, and the cleaved caspase-3 and also apprehends the self-renewal property of stem cells of glioma (Wei, 2018). It has also been reported that A. scholaris competently regulates the stomach cancer of mice promoted by benzopyrene (Chhajed, 2023). Interestingly hydroalcoholic stem bark extract of A. scholaris has the capacity of chemomodulation in combination with berberine hydrochloride in mice having Ehrlich ascites carcinoma in a concentration dependent manner (Khyade, 2014). In A549 NSCLC cells alkaloids and triterpenoids from A. scholaris promotes apoptosis via lowering the levels of expression of pro-casp8 and Bcl-2 and up-regulating the expression of cleaved caspase 8 which leads to cell death (Feng et al., 2013). According to a research, A. scholaris exhibits anti-mutagenic and anti-carcinogenic effects on peripheral human lymphocyte culture and albino mice bone marrow cells towards genotoxicity enhanced by methyl methane sulfonate (Ahmad et al., 2016). However, there is no recent advances in the study of anti-cancer property of A. scholaris. Numerous studies are required in this area to give a novel and beneficial therapeutic regimen in the field of cancer with no side effects and higher cure rate.

6. Toxicity of A. scholaris

There are not much of studies which have reported the toxic potential of *A. scholaris*. However, in a study, the authors checked the acute and sub-acute toxicity of the bark extracts of *A. scholaris* by feeding to the mice. They reported the highest acute toxicity in summer season, while least was reported to be in winter season. Moreover, the sub-acute toxicity was checked at a dose of 120 mg/kg and 240 m/kg. The higher dose was found to be more toxic due to higher concentration of echetamine from *A. scholaris* (Baliga, 2012).

7. Conclusion

A. scholaris is a well-known plant that is used to cure a variety of illnesses in traditional and folk medicine. The plant A. scholaris has a wide range of pharmacological activities, and many of its isolated compounds have not been studied for their pharmacological activity. For this reason, it appears important to substantiate the use of this plant for therapeutic purposes by conducting scientific validation of the pharmacological properties of its constituents. The precise mechanisms underlying different pharmacological characteristics remain unclear. For this reason, A. scholaris merits considerably more clinical study and research before it can be considered a medication of interest.

Table 1

Language	Synonyms of Alstonia scholaris		
English	Devil's tree, Black board tree, White cheese wood, Chalkwood tree, Milky pine, Milk wood, Pine, Dita bark, Birrba		
Hindi	Saittan ka jhad, Chatian, Shaitan ped, Chitvan		
Sanskrit	Saptaparna, Phalagaruda, Grahanashana, Madagandha, Grahashi, Kshalrya, Payasya, Jivani, Vishalalvaka, Ayugmapama, Vishamachhda		
Oriya	Silgandha, Chhanchania, Chhatiana		
Bengali	Chattin		
Kannada	Hale, Doddapala		
Marathi	Salvin, Santhni		
Tamil	Pala, Wedrase, Elilaipillai, Mukumpalei		
Telugu	Edakulapada		
Gujrati	Saptaparni		
Malayalam	Daivapala		
Sindhi	Rukattana		

Common names of Alstonia scholaris used in different languages of India

Table 2

Phytochemical Class	Compound	Part of A. scholaris	Reference
Alkaloids	5-Methoxyaspidophylline	Leaves	(Rudani et al., 2020)
	5a-Methoxystrictamine	Leaves	(Khyade et al., 2014)
	5-Methoxystictamine	Leaves	(Khyade et al., 2014)
	5-epi-Nareline ethyl ether	Leaves	(Chaudhary, 2022)
	6,7-seco-Angustilobine B	Leaves	(Macabeo et al., 2005)
	17-O-Acetylechitamine	Barks	(Zhao et al., 2023)
	18-Hydroxy-19,20-dehydro-7, 21-seco-uleine	Leaves	(Oktavia et al., 2020)
	19-E-Vallesamine	Fruits	(Khyade et al., 2014)

19-S-Scholaricine	Fruits	
19-E-Picrinine	Fruits	
19-E-Akuammidine	Fruits	
19-Epischolaricine	Leaves	(Zhao et al., 2021)
19,20-(E)-Valllesamine	Leaves	(Khyade et al., 2014)
19,20-Dihydrocondylocarpine	Leaves	(Alvi and Muzaffar, 1986)
19,20-E-Alstoscholarine	Leaves	(Oktavia et al., 2020)
20(S)-Tubotaiwine	Leaves	(Jeet et al., 2020)
Akuammicine	Roots	(Mahar et al., 2022)
Akuammicine-N _b -methiodide	Roots	(Reddy, 2016)
Akuammicine-N _b -oxide	Roots	(Haridas et al., 2016)
Akuammicine N-oxide	Barks	
Akuammiginone	Barks	(Salim et al., 2004)
Alstonine	Leaves	(Bainsal et al., 2021)
Alschomine	Leaves	(Qin et al., 2023)
Akuammidine	Leaves	(Mahar et al., 2022)
Angustilobine B N ⁴ -oxide	Leaves	(Krishnan et al., 2019)
Angustilobine B	Leaves	
Angustilobine B acid	Leaves	
Echitaminic acid	Barks	(Rudani et al., 2020)
Echitamine	Barks	
Echitamidine N-oxide	Barks	
Echitamidine	Leaves	
Lagunamine	Leaves	(Lee and Sperry, 2022)
Losbanine	Leaves	(Majid and Faraj, 2023)
Manilamine	Leaves	(Elshaier et al., 2022)
N ⁴ -Methyl angustilobine B	Leaves	(Macabeo et al., 2005)
N ¹ -Methoxymethyl picrinine	Leaves	
N ^b -Methylscholaricine	Leaves	
Nareline	Leaves, Fruits	(Chaudhary, 2022)
Nareline methyl ether	Leaves	(Shrivastava et al., 2016)
Picralinal	Leaves	(Qin et al., 2023)
Picraline	Leaves	(Paul et al., 2021)
Picrinine	Leaves, Flowers, Fruits	(Li et al., 2019)
Quinoline	Leaves	(Yang et al., 2015)
Rhazimanine		(Rudani et al., 2020)
Scholarisine A	Leaves	(Zhan et al., 2020)
Scholaricine	Leaves	
Strictamine	Flower, Fruits	(Hamdiani et al., 2018)
Tubotaiwine oxide	Leaves	(Zhang et al., 2023)
Vallesamine N ^b -oxide	Leaves	(Mohammed et al., 2021)

Terpenoids and Sterols	3,28-β-Diacetoxy-5-olea-triterpene		Flower (Dey, 2011)
	β-Sitosterol	Leaves	(Ghansenyuy et al., 2023)
	β-amyrin	Flower	(Akbar et al., 2020)
	<i>n</i> -Tetracosane	Leaves	(Singh et al., 2020)
	α-Amyrin acetate	Barks, Flowers, Fruits	(Ali et al., 2022)
	Alstonic acids A and B	Leaves	(Akbar, 2020)
	Betulin	Leaves, Flowers	(Ali et al., 2021)
	Betulinic acid	Leaves, Flowers	(Akbar et al., 2020)
	Lupeol acetate	Barks	(Ali et al., 2021)
	Oleanolic acid	Leaves	(Wang et al., 2017)
	Sweroside	Leaves	(Zengin et al., 2023)
	Ursolic acid	Leaves, Flowers	(Wang et al., 2017)
Flavonoids	Quercetin	Leaves	(Banik et al., 2023)
	Quercetin-3-O-β-D- galactopyranoside	Leaves	(Banik <i>et al.</i> , 2023)
	(+)-lyoniresinol 3α-O-β-D- glucopyranoside	Leaves	(Afreen et al., 2021)
	Kaempferol	Leaves	(Singh et al., 2017)
	Isorhamnetin	Barks	(Kawiwong et al., 2020)
	Apioglucosides	Stems	(Chanda and Ramachandra, 2019
	Isorhamnetin-3-O-β-D- galactopyranoside	Leaves	(Bainsal et al., 2021)
	Kaempferol-3-O-β-D- galactopyranoside	Leaves	(Singh et al., 2017)
	Alstonoside 1	Stems	(Nanditha et al., 2020)
Iridoids	Scholareins A-D	Barks	(Indradi et al., 2023)
	Isoboonein	Barks	(Khyade et al., 2014)
	Alyxialactone	Barks	(Khyade et al., 2014)
	Loganin	Barks	(Feng et al., 2008)
	Loganetin	Stems	
Essential oils	α-Terpineol	Flowers	(Singh et al., 2020)
	Terpinen-4-ol	Flowers	-
	Linalool	Flowers	
	2-Phenylethyl acetate	Flowers	
	Furanoid	Flowers	
	Pyranoid	Flowers	



Alstonia scholaris plant



Bark of Alstonia scholaris



Figure 2: Structure of some phytochemicals isolated from Alstonia scholaris

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