



# Jottings

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## The Memorial Service for the Jewish Community of Hania that perished in 1944



Interior of the Kal just prior to the beginning of the Memorial Service.

For the second year a formal commemorative service was held at Etz Hayyim in memory of the martyrs from our community who perished in 1944. Invitations were sent to all of the shopkeepers on Kondylakis St. This was the main artery of the old Jewish Quarter (Ovraiki) where most of the Jews lived in 1944 and where the Nazi 'action' took place in May 1944. Notice was also sent to the Metropolitan Bishops of Hania and Kissamou-Selinou, the Friars of the Catholic Church of Hania and the nuns of Mother Theresa, the Municipal authorities as well as the many friends of the Synagogue in Hania. Metropolitan Irinaeos of Kissamou-Selinou being ill was unable to come, but the friars and nuns assembled with us and over 180 others from Hania and elsewhere to bring to memory the fate of our community.

The spirit of Etz Hayyim is very much dominated by a sense of renewal and our services reflect the new life of the Synagogue. In this instance as we had a minyan we were able to anticipate opening the Ehal and for-

mally reciting the Kaddish. It was felt that an intimate participation of our Christian (and one Muslim) friends was necessary hence the service was concentrated around Arvith Prayers and all participants received translations of the Shema and Amidah Prayers.

The service opened with a short eulogy given by the director (see below) which was followed by five minutes of silence.

Immediately after this silence Arvith prayers were said and the Ehal was opened and Elizabeth Outram, Manolis Gazis and Constantine Fischer read out slowly the 265 names of the Community. This was followed by the Kaddish and then the formal prayers for Martyrs. Mr Gazis and Mr Dimitris Mayonezos-Fourakis gave short memorials on the community. Tables had been arranged in the north courtyard and after the service refreshments were served.

## Eulogy given by Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis prior the service

The greatest sin that a Jew can commit is that he deny by word or act the Unity of God. An act such as this is called a desecration of God's ineffable Name. To deny God's unity by word is to accept any doctrine that might imply that God has a partner or an origin. To desecrate the Name by act is to behave towards our fellow man in any way that denies his dignity

and rights as having been made in God's 'image'. Since God has no form and no shape He fills the created universe as water fills a container – complete and fully saturating it. At times we can call this Reality – the unity of existence out of which we and all matter are drawn and in which we are sustained.

In the Book of Genesis it says

that God is Righteous and Just – this is His 'image' as reflected in the world of relativity and we are called upon to act according to our essential nature – which is that we are sparks of God. Anything that we do; to others, to animals, to plants, to minerals and the objects that serve us made from them, is to frustrate their fulfillment. God is as a great sea of which we and

all of creation are waves, each whole and entire and the more wonderful as each is distinct and perfect as it is. We are but for a moment in time and then we subside again into the great sea that is God Himself... We sanctify the Holy Name by being Just and Righteous, Benevolent and Compassionate

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## The Inscriptions of the Etz Hayyim Synagogue Prof. Rabbi Nicholas De Lange, Cambridge University

The Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania, the only surviving monument of the Jewish communities in Crete, has been lovingly and painstakingly restored. The precincts of the synagogue contain a number of Hebrew inscriptions. Some of these have never been published, while others have become easier to read after cleaning. The following is a record of all the inscriptions, as they appear at present. I should like to acknowledge with gratitude the kindness and assistance of the director of the restoration project, Nikos Stavroulakis, during visits to Hania in the summer of 1999, and to Professor Raphael Loewe for helpful advice and for kindly converting the dates. The photographs were kindly supplied by Ole Petscheleit.

The inscriptions are essentially of two kinds. The first category

(numbers 1-3) are dedicatory inscriptions, set permanently in the gates and walls of the synagogue, and intended to be read by those entering as a reminder of the beneficence of those individuals or groups of people who have contributed to the construction, repair or embellishment of the synagogue in the past. The second category (numbers 4-7) are funerary inscriptions, commemorating those who have recently passed away and drawing attention to their virtues and achievements. Not all of the individuals named on these inscriptions are buried in the synagogue precinct. Some of the stones were originally in the Jewish cemetery which formerly stood near the seashore outside the town wall to the west. 'Regrettably, that area, now fully built up, contains no trace of Hebrew epigraphy,' as the

Jewish historian Zvi Ankori stated, addressing a conference in Hania in April of 1966 (Ankori, 'Jews', p. 320).

The existence of a number of graves in the rear courtyard of the Etz Hayyim synagogue invites some comment, as it is not a common Jewish custom. Rabbi Abraham Evlagon (1846-1933), who ministered to the Jewish community in Crete from 1875 onwards, compiled in the later years of his life an account of the island and its Jewish communities. He writes:

'Within the courtyard of the synagogue surrounded by a wall on all four sides is the resting place of the town rabbi Rabbi Joseph Shalom; there is no stone upon his grave. The reason that he rests there is that on account of the deplorable conditions of wartime the gate had been shut to prevent entry or egress. Subsequently

his brother, Rabbi Baruch ben Shalom, passed away on the 4th of Adar 5601; he had given instructions before his death that he should be buried beside his brother, and his wishes were respected. Rabbi Abraham Ibn Habib of Gallipoli who came to serve in the sanctuary and died in 5618 [1858] is buried there too, and there is an oral tradition that the pious cabalist Rabbi Hillel Ashkenazi, who came to minister in the sanctuary in the year 5470 [1710], is also buried there.' [Evlagon, p. 133]

Rabbi Evlagon's account, which has been published from his original manuscript by Bracha Rivlin, is an invaluable testimony to the Jewish monuments of Crete, and records the wording of some of the inscriptions *in*

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## The Memorial Day (from page 1)

— and Loving.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1944, 276 citizens of Hania were drowned off of the Island of Milos. Indications are that the ship, the Tanais, that bore them and several hundred Greek Christian and Italian prisoners of war, was torpedoed by a British submarine. The destination of the ship is known. As a carrier for one of the last Nazi 'Actions' in Greece the Tanais was bound for Piraeus and its Jews would have been taken to the Athens central railway station and there put into cattle-cars to be sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau – a journey that would have taken at least 13 days in 1944. Save for a very few, if any, they would have immediately been selected for the gas-chambers and crematoria.

One cannot but wonder what happened in the hold of the Tanais at 3:15 in the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup> of June when the ship disintegrated and sank within fifteen minutes leaving no Jewish survivors. We can know that through the hold of the ship one would have heard the Shema – 'Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God. The Lord is One.' For centuries the Shema has been whispered, cried, shouted in rage, and pain by Jews throughout the world as they bore witness and sanctified the Holy Name at the moment of death, either natural death or in many cases death imposed by the fact that they were Jews. Jewish character and being is so dominated by the Shema and the Sanctification of the Name that entire communities of Jews in England, at York, the Rhine and in Gerona in Spain, chose suicide rather than submit to conversion and denying God's Unity. Our sages were forced to ponder these terrible acts and in the end drew deeply on the inner teachings of Judaism. If God is Reality and our lives are Its very expression then life itself, lived justly according to the Torah is in itself a Sanctification of the Name. Even conversion, a verbal denial of the Unity of God, is second to our obligation to live our lives as well as we can and under whatever circumstances for the short moment of existence that is ours.

Who were the Jews of Hania? What do we know of them? What meaning was there in the senseless deaths of women, children, aged and young men – all Cretans and deeply rooted in the fabric of the history of our Island. It does not seem that they were either better or worse than their Christian and Catholic neighbors. They argued and laughed, disagreed and were more or less observant in their religious duties as Jews. They must have been respected as we know that the Christian bakery on Zambeliou St. would not accept dishes that included pork for baking in the ovens. There is a Christian woman, Magdalini, who as a child was called upon each Shabbat to turn on or off the electricity in the house of a Jewish neighbor. There was a Yacovos who wore vrakia and mantili whose voice apparently outmatched that of the last Muezzin of Yusuf Pasha Mosque –



**Prof. Joseph Ventoura reading the Pray-er for Martyrs that was recited after the Kaddish.**

now the Archaeological Museum. There was the memory of the blessed Rabbi Abraham Evlagon who was loved by one and all in Hania and who greeted all whom he met with 'Shalom'. There is the even sadder memory of Victoria Fermon who was the only survivor of the arrest of the community in Hania and who wandered like a ghost amongst the living in Hania until only a few years ago when she was gathered into the arms of Sarah, Rachel, Leah and Rebecca. These Jews were neither better nor worse than the people amongst whom they lived – yet we are blessed and honoured through them to be able to perform this sacred act of remembrance of their sanctification of the Holy Name as martyrs. What marked them out for extinction was the simple fact that they were Jews and nothing else.

Despite the current fashion to consider Crete and Cretans from the perspective of Mainland Greece as uniformly Christian and Orthodox the fact is that Crete has been a mother to Jews, Christians – Orthodox and Catholic, and Muslims. It has nurtured them for centuries and has only recently lost a plurality that made our island rich and admittedly at times problematic for conquerors, be they Venetians or Ottomans or Germans. The Jews of Hania were one thread in the rich tapestry of the history of our island.

Your participation in this memorial service is especially important as it is a re-forged link in the broken chain of Jewish presence on this great Island. Tonight we gather together in Etz Hayyim synagogue to bear witness to this presence and to bring back into memory of the living, the names of the men, women and children of our community and to pray that God shelter them under His wings as does the eagle - that He bear them to fulfillment on these wings of Life.

(Five minutes of Silence)

*With whom do we share this strange and powerful building? Ceremonies not unlike our own, though less immediate in content observed within the very walls that we now gather in. Our very lives, our presence here connects us with the community of Hania, in the web of life and death in which we are all joined and related. What may we have learned from this senseless death that hovered over them? Though it may seem that we have progressed far beyond the events of 1941-45 that brought such suffering on people who were little different than ourselves, our world has not really changed much. Greed, anger, ignorance continue to characterize our indifference to the environment, to people seeking to have secure homes, a land of their own perhaps. Civil war, genocide, the destruction of our environment, political and military rivalries continue under different flags, different mottos, different aspirations. What can this community perhaps teach us? Open our hearts to?*

## Docents

In early June we had two 14 year old girls act as docents in the Synagogue. Meena Hasan and Alexandra Glicker – both from New York – were sent by their parents to spend a fortnight in Hania. They stayed at the director's house and arrangements were made well in advance so that they had a good balance of work, sight-seeing and swimming. After Shahrith prayers in the morning they arrived to work on the inner walls of the synagogue. In the course of the restoration it was decided that no paint be put on the walls and that they be simply white washed. As the 'trapped' moisture in the walls began to come out it meant that there was some calcification and so the work of our docents was to scrape off the residues and then sand the walls down. Incidentally they also arranged, ordered the catering and decorated a corner of the Konaki Restaurant as a surprise birthday party for the director!

## Work in progress



Perhaps inspired by the work of Meena Hasan and Alex Glicker further work is being carried out on the wood and metal exterior fittings of the synagogue.

All of the doors, sills and shutters have been given a protective coating of sun and water repellent varnish.

The metal grills on the windows and gates have been re-painted in a more vital green than we had before.



The Abraham and Helen Sirkin family posing in front of the Ehal of the synagogue at the end of their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary celebration.



Cretan dancers in traditional costume entertaining the Sirkin min-clan.

## Anniversary at Etz Hayyim

Franz Kafka in a small book called *Paradoxes* has one that goes 'A birdceage went in search for a bird.' Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Hania, since its re-dedication in 1999, is in many ways a synagogue in search for a community. This is not by any means a 'normal' situation, but, on the other hand, the destruction of its last community in 1944 was not 'normal' either. It would be more than one could expect that it begin a new period in its existence in a normal manner.

Since opening its doors to the public Etz Hayyim has attracted world wide interest. To some extent this has been a consequence of its web site at [www.etz-hayyim-hania.org](http://www.etz-hayyim-hania.org) but more important is the response of its many visitors who come from all over the world and many of whom wish to remain in some contact with the experience that they have had in the course of their visit. For many it is the first awareness of the very ancient Jewish presence in Crete, for others it is the surprise at discovering the sad details that marked the destruction of the previous Community. Still others find the peace and quiet of the synagogue a welcome pause in the otherwise hectic period of touring Crete. To date we have some 150 people from Europe, the US and Israel who in their own way are committed to Etz Hayyim. Some are highly observant Jews, others are Liberal, Reform and Conservative – some are not even religiously oriented. Nonetheless each in his or her own way share in the renewed life of the synagogue and many return on the Holidays to assist us in having a minyan. A good number are Christians and Muslims who, as Children of Abraham, have their own place with us in Etz Hayyim. One of the roles of Etz Hayyim has been to be a place of not only recollection but of reconciliation – and mutual respect.

In late June Etz Hayyim welcomed and hosted Mr and Mrs Abra-

ham and Helen Sirkin of Bethesda Maryland and their four children and assorted grandchildren – some 24 persons in total. The purpose of their visit was to celebrate their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and the choice of Etz Hayyim was dictated by a long friendship with its director that dates back to 1964 when Mr Sirkin was the Cultural Attache at the US Embassy in Athens. Plans for this celebration were laid a year ago and the synagogue and its courtyards and mikveh all played a role in making the week a memorable one. On the Thursday evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> June a welcome dinner was held at the Konaki restaurant that caters for all of our needs and now prepares traditional recipes – both Jewish as well as Cretan for us. At the end of the meal Cretan dancers put on a two hour performance of dancing at the end of which many of the party took part. On Friday the 29<sup>th</sup> June Kabala Shabbath took place in the synagogue after which dinner was served in the courtyard and blessings and good wishes and good memories were shared. Both Mr and Mrs Sirkin spoke lovingly of their long lives together and the blessing that it was to have us all gathered together under the renewed branches of Etz Hayyim – truly a Tree of Life.

On Shabbath Shahrith prayers were said somewhat informally as we had no minyan but after the service everyone gathered in the north courtyard where traditional Shabbath 'brunch' was served at a noon time buffet. Cucumbers, sliced tomatoes, olives, huevos haminados, tursi (pickled aubergines, peppers, cauliflower, kaltsounakia (spinach calsones) – and ouzo!

## Inscriptions (→ page 1)

*extenso*. It is referred to at several points below, as are two important articles by Zvi Ankori. More recently, the late Judith Humphrey, who devoted herself to the study of the Jews of Crete (and who is commemorated in the little garden in the forecourt of the synagogue), also wrote about Hebrew inscriptions in Chania. Details of these publications are given in the bibliography at the end.

In an appendix I have listed some other Hebrew inscriptions of Chania, either preserved outside the synagogue or (apparently) lost.

In the inscriptions, square brackets indicate missing text, and a hollow dot above a letter indicates an uncertain reading.

### Dedicatory inscriptions

1a. In the pediment above the gate leading into the forecourtyard of the synagogue, and visible from the street.

Height 16 cm.; width 135 cm.

ז זמרה תנשריאל  
יתנבו יתשקה חתפה תא  
ישטרק וניילא ינא  
ייהלו ישפנ רפוכל ל  
י ינינו ינב"ל

*(In the) year 5247, 7th of Iyyar I, Eliano Cortese, may he live for ever, dedicated and built the entrance for the ransom of his own soul and for the lives of my children and grandchildren, may they live for ever.*

### Notes

Described by Evlagon (p. 132) and discussed by Humphrey. Eliano Cortese, evidently an eminent personality, is not attested elsewhere. The name Eliano is most unusual in Hebrew contexts, and the surname Cortese does not figure in the annals of the Jews of Venetian Crete so far as I am aware.

The date corresponds to 1 May 1487 (Julian calendar).

תא There is a mark at the beginning of the second line that might be read as a letter ו or ז. Evlagon, followed by Humphrey.

Humphrey הילא,

Evlagon הילא: וניילא  
Cortese or Cortesi?

Evlagon, Humphrey.

שיטרק: ישיטרק

for the expression ישפנ רפוכל  
see No. 2 below

Evlagon, Humphrey רפוכל:  
היה/היהי וא מלועל וחי /  
דעל וחי: "ל

1b. On the lintel, immediately beneath 1a.

Height 17 cm.; width 167 cm.

הו רעשה הוהיל מיקודצ ואובי וב  
וחתפ מירעש אוביו יוג קידצ אש

**This is the gate of the Lord: into which the righteous shall enter [Psalm 118:20].**

**Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in [Isaiah 26:2].**

### Notes

Mentioned by Ankori, 'Jews', p. 318, Evlagon p. 132, Humphrey p. 37



(photograph p. 39).

סינמא רמוש:אש

2. On the outer wall of the forecourt facing the entrance from the street.

Height 43 cm.; width 36 cm.

תרכומ [...] מינ  
מינהכה ינגסלו  
מינורחאו מינושאר  
מינכשה תכרעת  
שלשב ... מינ  
מינוגה תורצ  
מינמאב הנכינ

*A memorial to the ? priests and deputies of the priests, both the former and the latter ones, ... of the residents, in three ?years, decent in ?troubles,*



?named among the faithful ones.



## Inscriptions

(from page 3)

### Notes

This rhymed inscriptions pays tribute to a group of people, but it no longer seems possible to discover who they were or why they were being honoured. Evlagon and Ankori were unable to read any of the inscription because of a coat of whitewash that had been laid over it. Ankori ('Jews', p. 319) was of the opinion that 'the stone had originally been used as lintel of the inner entrance into the synagogue hall proper, until replaced by a later inscription'.

<sup>1</sup> Perhaps מינקול ומינהכל?

<sup>4</sup> הכרעת. This is not a Hebrew word. הכרעת could conceivably mean a throng. הכרעת ('display'), הכרעת ('guarantee'), and הכרעת ('phalanx') are all inherently possible. הכרעת are dwellers or neighbours.

<sup>5</sup> ...?

3. Above the front entrance to the prayer hall.

Height 33 cm.; width 141 cm.

יקל

ה ירב ריאת התא יכבשה היגי הלא [?] [ש]יטינו לאכמ רב השמ אפר

**For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness [Psalm 18:29 (28)]. (In the) year 5281. Moses son of Michael Yeniati.**

### Notes

Missing text supplied from Evlagon. NB date could be read as 'the physician'. Ankori, 'Inscriptions' n.112, remarks that the date contains a pun



on the phrase 'to be healed'.

The year corresponds to CE 1520/21.

the ללא is written as a ligature, with a dot over it. תיוק ותעושי ל קל: <sup>4</sup> רב: Evlagon ב.

Yeniati: so written by Humphrey. Nothing else is known of him. We hear of an Abraham Yeniati in Canea (Chania) in the 16th century; his married daughter Esther died in the terrible plague of 1592. Much later, another Moses Yeniati was *gabbai* of the Priests' synagogue in Candia in 1654.

### Funerary inscriptions

4. A plaque of white marble now situated on the east wall of the rear courtyard.

Total area:

height 40 cm. max; width 39 cm.

Inscribed area:

height 36.5 cm.; width 25.5 cm.

וובנה תבצמ וויצ  
אבא רהכ הלועמו  
עג וגידימלאד:רטפנ  
בל "הל מימי השולש ע'  
עקתה תנש ולסכ"ב  
בצנת הריציל "ה:  
5572

Indicating the tombstone of the wise and distinguished Abba Delmedigo, may he repose in Eden.

Departed to his eternal home on the third day of the month Kislev of the year 5572 of the Creation. May his soul be bound up in the bundle of life.

### Notes

The date corresponds to 7 November 1881 Julian (19 November Gregorian). Mentioned by Ankori, 'Jews' p. 320) ('in private hands now').

דע וחונו ענ:

The Delmedigo family was one of the most famous Jewish families in Crete. Abba ('Abdaki') Delmedigo of Chania was a member of the General Assembly of Crete in 1875, and Ankori ('Jews') speculates that he may have been the grandson of his name sake who is commemorated in this inscription.

5. Slab of white marble placed against the wall of the rear courtyard.

Height 122 cm.; width 66 cm.

תרטע ליה תשא תרבק תבצמ תאו  
תורבקל מוי אוהה מויה הרבע מוי  
התאכנ תיב הבועו הרדענו הלבוח  
רפע ירוח ממש רבדמ הנכשו  
מיפיכו: השרי רמ ירידב התלוחו  
הרמ שפנב התמשנ האצי דע  
מייב הטאמטס לחר הל האנ המשו  
תנש ירשת שדהל רשע מינש שדק תבש  
מיעשתו השלשו תואמ שמהו סיפלא תשמה  
הריציל:הרש מע דע נגב חונת השפנ  
האלו לחר הקבר  
בצנת"ה

This monument marks the grave of a virtuous wife, a crown [sc. To her husband, cf. Proverbs 12:4]. That day is a day of wrath [Zechariah 1:15], the day she was taken to the graves and departed and left the house of her ... and inhabited a ? desolate wilderness, in caves of earth and in the rocks [Job 30:6]. She fell ill and ... until her spirit departed with a bitter soul [cf. Job 21:25]. Her name becomes her: Rachel Stamata. She died on the holy Sabbath day, the twelfth of the month of Tishri in the year five thousand five hundred and ninety-three of the Creation. May her soul repose in the Garden of Eden together with Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah. May her soul be bound up in the bundle of life.

### Notes

The date corresponds to 24 September 1832 Julian (6 October Gregorian).

Job 30:6 ירוח מייכו

6. Slab of marble placed against the wall of the rear courtyard.

Height 121 cm.; width 73 cm.

רמ רסח רמ רפסמו לוק מעתנ  
מיניקב חירצאו הא ורמא וכל  
מינב לוסנ מוקרב ינבל ריק רקרקא  
מינבא לג |אילכ צצקנ ולאכ ננדוע  
מינש רוצקב פטקנ וומכו |דורבה אוה  
רטפנ ויטנאטשוק מהרבא לאפר מינענו  
י קש מוינקתה תנש א רדא "דמי א

...voice ...bitter ...say 'woe' and I shall cry out in lamentations; therefore shall I break down the walls ...sons ...a heap of stones. He is still as though cut off ...and as if cut down in his prime (lit, shortness of years). He is the blessed and pleasant

Raphael Abraham Kostantin, (who) died on the holy Sabbath day, 10 of 1 Adar in the year 5521 [1761]. May his resting-place be respected.

### Notes

This rhymed elegy is very hard to read, as the stone is badly weathered. The date corresponds to 3 February 1761 Julian (14 February Gregorian).

לֵאֵל לִיגְטוּר

The surname Kostantin or al-Kostantin is found in various Jewish documents from Crete. For example, Abba, the son of Abraham al-Kostantin the physician, died together with his wife Esther and their son Abraham in the great plague of 1592. Moses, son of Menahem al-Kostantin, was a communal rabbi in Candia in the latter part of the 17th century.

דובכ וככשמ יהי דמי: Cf. Isaiah 11:10, דובכ ותחונמ התיחו

7. Slab of marble, broken and incomplete. The seven surviving pieces have been laid in the rear courtyard.

Height 142 cm.; width 89.5 cm.

מלה  
ש רבוע לכ[וא]הרמ הניק  
וכב [ב]הננר תהת היכ  
יאה [?]רפעב ילב תא רפוש  
הנינח דבא מואתפ עתפ  
יפ [...]הרותב ודקשו  
...הנינפ ליק  
[ר]וצע וכוה שח ה  
רכב דורב רהומכ דיסחה  
ז המלש "ישיב שקבתנ ל[הב  
ד מייב הלעמלש]  
רתה ש רדא "הריציל א

Every passer-by raise a bitter lament; Weep tears instead of rejoicing.

...horn ...the dust

In an instant the Merciful one Has perished; ...and assiduous student of Torah, ...? Pearl.

our pious Rabbi Barukh son of Rabbi Solomon of blessed memory. He was summoned to the academy on high on the fourth day of Adar in the year 5601 [1841] of the Creation.

(To be continued in next issue)

## WEB SITE and DATA BASE

In the future the web site will be changed more frequently and in addition we are preparing a data base. The latter will evolve as material and time dictate. At the moment we are concentrating on specific subjects such as: a) Bibliography on Cretan Jewry, b) Articles on Creto-Judaean history, c) Photographs, d) Membership lists, e) Recent events, e) Related material from other Jewish centers in Greece, f) Family trees and lineages of Cretan Jews as well as names and addresses of persons who come from families originating in Crete.

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