

A LEVEL

Examiners' report

ANCIENT HISTORY

H407


For first teaching in 2017


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Contents

Introduction	3
Paper 21 series overview	4
Section A overview.....	6
Question 1	7
Question 2	10
Question 3	12
Section B overview.....	13
Question 4	14
Question 5	15
Question 6	17
Copyright information.....	17


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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates. The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report. A full copy of the question paper can be downloaded from OCR.

Paper 21 series overview

This is a new specification for Ancient History and new criteria for assessment. This required candidates to assess themes in the period study and to explore specific issues in more depth in the depth study. In addition, Section A included a new element of assessing the view of a modern author on specific debate. In the depth study the candidates had to analyse and evaluate a specific passage from prescribed sources on a well-defined topic. In general candidates rose to the challenge and in a number of cases excellently, with few clearly having difficulties. The specification highlights the use of ancient sources as a key component for assessment and responses showed candidates meeting this criterion, for the most part, in a reasonable manner; some responses indeed exhibited a set of skills which was very good, even excellent. This was especially true in the newer style questions (Questions 3 and 4).

The examination questions proved accessible to all levels where candidates had engaged with the subject during their period of study. The great majority had clearly studied the prescribed sources and had appreciated the nature and differences between them in terms of genre and content. There was a consistent engagement with the sources which was especially pleasing to examiners.

For successful responses candidates need to display a secure knowledge of the ancient sources and the historical periods studied, displayed in precise and accurate examples; in addition to perform well their judgements needed to be well-developed from the evidence, rather than asserted sentences; the prescribed sources needed to be carefully evaluated in the context showing how the context, genre and preconceptions of the author impacted on the reliability of the evidence.

The majority of good responses displayed secure knowledge and understanding at least part of the period and the depth study, although clearly in the context of an examination of limited time, errors were made and misconceptions arose, more numerous only in the less successful responses.

The majority of good responses formed most of their judgements on the evidence, literary and material, producing convincing, and at times thorough, explanations although not always consistently. The vast majority of responses offered good or very good explanations at some point in the text, but again not consistently. This showed they had engaged with the material in the specification and had understood the issues in both the period and depth study. Less successful responses were characterised by limited sources, generalised factual knowledge, inaccurate chronology, general source references ('Suetonius tells us', 'According to Plutarch'), confusion between emperors and simple inaccuracies.

The analysis and evaluation of sources and the way the context of the sources production affects the portrayal of events was very variable. Candidates who were less successful offered a paragraph on the author or genre (sometimes), or the background and supposed bias. For example, 'Tacitus was a senator and was biased towards emperors' with little attempt to relate the evaluation to the evidence being used. Sometimes the paragraph which followed concluded that we could not trust the author but the candidate did not seem to see that this negated the argument just presented in the response. On the other hand, many made attempts to deal with specific evidence, notably with material examples such as coins as propaganda mostly confined to the period rather than the depth study.

There were, of course, some less successful responses, much of the time due to a failure to produce ancient sources; occasionally this amounted to none at all. This, in terms of the assessment criteria, damages the response even where it displayed detailed knowledge and understanding of the issue and context in the question. Some candidates appeared to be less secure in their knowledge the period, especially those who performed less well

Timing appeared not to be an issue with candidates – very few indicated an unfinished question. Only occasionally was a question not answered at all. The candidates appeared to find the questions accessible at all levels in some form.

Section A overview

Question 1 was more popular than Question 2 which required a detailed knowledge of a specific ancient source. Most responses for Question 1 displayed a knowledge of the period and an understanding of the historical features in AO1; there was a pleasing variety of sources including material evidence for AO3; the dates and agendas of authors were not always known or understood, especially where authors wrote some time after the periods; explanations and judgements varied from one sentence to clearly expressed and logically reasoned judgements substantiated with developed explanations based on the evidence (AO2).

Question 3 (the newest element in the specification) revealed how well the candidates had engaged with the material. The responses displayed relevant and well-developed skills in assessing the opinion of the author, both in agreeing with and challenging it.

Question 1

SECTION A: The Julio-Claudian Emperors, 31 BC–AD 68

- 1* To what extent and for what reasons did the emperors attempt to improve the lives of the inhabitants of the city of Rome?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [30]

The responses varied from the very good to those exhibiting little understanding of the issue in the questions. The majority of responses dealt with the attempts and reasons well.

Very good responses took the approach of not narrating each emperor. They identified the key ways in which improvement could be made and dealt with, what a selection of emperors did in each of these ways – similarly with 'reasons', grouping actions under headings and identifying how the actions of emperors related to these. This is more analytical and less a run through events with a brief added note on a reason.

Responses had a variety of material to show the attempts made by emperors. Good responses included various attempts – food supply, water supply, security and fire prevention, entertainments, creation of peace and stability, provision of work, enhanced status and roles for the upper classes, multiple buildings and money handouts. Many responses assumed inhabitants means poor/ordinary citizens ignoring other groups who lived/worked in Rome.

Not all responses made clear connections between actions and improvements: the corn supply, aqueducts, the night-watch, and so on were relatively straightforward and dealt with well; explaining how the building of the Temple of Mars improved lives proved more difficult; The Augustan Forum is explained in Suetonius but appeared very rarely. Most mentioned 'bread and circuses', some referring to Juvenal correctly but hardly ever explaining the rest of the reference and giving the quote a context.

Better responses had a range of reasons and linked them clearly to the attempts. Reasons covered most often meant 'making happier'; there were rarely multiple reasons. Most frequent were popularity, maintain power and support, rarely to avoid riots, or genuine concern. Sometimes they were specific to emperor such as Claudius' need to gain immediate support given the antipathy of the Senate or only 8 days of grain left and needed to get on with it.

Good responses displayed a good range of knowledge of the sources, often detailed, with accurate quotes or close paraphrases. This was used to support the judgements and explanations in those which performed well. Good evaluation of specific examples produced well-developed judgements.

Less successfully in some responses, they were treated as fact rather than as support for an explanation. For example, they were selective especially on Gaius (hate me/fear me, only one neck,) and generalised assertions follow. There was much less of the context and how that impacts the conclusion we can take from them. 3 or 4 lines of general 'evaluation' often followed with no explanation as to how the background of the author, for example, impacted on the validity of the reference/quote just used. These many isolated paragraphs add little because they are not integrated into the development of the judgements.

Common mistakes were that the *Res Gestae* has the quote on brick and marble; Tacitus not Suetonius has Tiberius (literally) thrown into the Tiber. Sources might be named with a general idea of their view (e.g. Pliny the Elder comments on the buildings but no detail of what comment, or Virgil and Horace referenced for religion but again no specific point made).

Responses which chose to narrate through the emperors generally made much of Augustus using *Res Gestae*, Suetonius and Dio. After Augustus the responses gradually declined in quality, either through lack of information or sources or the candidate had spent too long on Augustus and needed to finish. Claudius and Nero, therefore received less discussion and assessment.

Assertions were made that Tiberius or Gaius did nothing to improve lives even when giving examples of actions they took such as Gaius reduction of the auction tax. Equally it was asserted without any evidence that the emperors did nothing for the senatorial class.

The question did not ask how far lives were improved but the extent to which attempts were made; responses which discuss the improvement of lives often were left to assert an improvement with no evidence, assuming a new temple did improve lives for example. Great play was made of Tiberius' failure to improve lives, or even made them worse with trials, but the issue in the question was: did he make any attempts and why; responses became diverted by his 'brutality' and lost focus.

Most responses had very good or at least good sections but were affected by a variety of misconceptions. A perfectly relevant reference to evidence might be affected by a misattribution leading to an erroneous conclusion or a misunderstanding of the context again leading to an unconvincing analysis. Minor errors of dates or events are to be expected to some extent in a timed examination and do not seriously affect the performance unless they lead to misunderstanding or an unsubstantiated judgement.

Common errors included mixing up the emperors – Claudius assassinated by senators (Gaius?), Gaius building a Golden House (Nero), Nero finishing aqueducts, Claudius thrown into Tiber (Tiberius – actually not literally thrown), Gaius' golden 5 years (Nero?); *Pontifex Maximus* was voted to Augustus in 23 BC by the Senate; he abolished the tribune.

Exemplar 1

		On his succession, Augustus
		gained plenty of pleb support
		through his extravagant games,
		secular games, steady grain supply,
		massive building works and cash
		grants. He sells his own property
		to pay each citizen, as proposed
		in Caesar's will, as well as
		settling large colonies for his
		troops and doubling the pay of

		35 legions.
		He writes about this himself
		in Res Gestae, an epigraphical source
		written by Augustus on bronze tablets.
		Although it is contemporary to the
		time, we must be cautious as it
		was extremely biased and heavy
		propaganda. In addition, it was
		overly positive and didn't include
		darker areas of his reign.

Exemplar 1 begins with a general assertion of the support of the plebs, followed by a list of actions, with only one being specific (Secular Games) including ones from outside the period in the 40s BC. The reference to the *Res Gestae* is general, not specific and is not integrated into the discussion/analysis. The common assertion that we must be cautious does not identify how far. It does not identify what in the preceding list we cannot trust as reliable. The reference to omission has no specific example nor an example of what is positive. It does not develop the issue in the question nor substantiate the knowledge provided.

Question 2

2* How useful is Suetonius for our understanding of the reigns of the emperors of this period? You must consider the accounts of at least **two** emperors in your answer.

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [30]

Very good responses took specific episodes and compared the detail in Suetonius with that of other writers/evidence. Reasonable responses produced narrative of episodes with sources attached offering some comparison with other evidence to match Suetonius. However, they lacked consistently developed points. The responses often assessed 'useful' in terms of how credible he and others were – for example the account of the fire in Rome (AD 64) and Suetonius differences on the cause and effect from Tacitus' more 'balanced' account. Another example was the *quadrans* of Gaius and the reference to the tax in Suetonius, developed with the later riot over taxes recorded in Dio or Josephus. This allowed assessment of the positive/negative account of the reign by Suetonius.

Some very good responses, instead of dealing with emperors in turn, looked at themes within the accounts such as the relationship with the senators, the attitude towards administration, the characterisation of the emperors and other themes and assessed the usefulness of the accounts.

Assessing the reliability of written or material sources is achieved only by using specific examples. General evaluations (that Suetonius always relies on gossip, or that Tacitus is completely negative towards Tiberius) do not allow the response to deal with the context and its impact on the issue convincingly. An example of undeveloped evaluation was to mention Augustus and Agrippa's aqueducts or the *Cloaca Maxima*, while claiming Suetonius is not to be trusted always because he writes as a moralist. It is not explained why the account of aqueducts is no longer credible in this case.

Some very carefully selected episodes are identified and explored analytically. Good responses selected a few key episodes which they could develop their assessment rather than a general, sometimes, erroneous overview of his biographies.

Some responses attempted a more narrative exploration of the emperors selected which reduces the opportunity for analysis. Some candidates prioritise exploration of the sources in a generalised way that detracts from the argument being made at a given point.

The focus for the good responses was the detail provided by Suetonius for a reign; less successful were the responses with a general sentence of Suetonius' view of an emperor followed by a (sometimes) detailed assessment of another author (e.g. Tacitus on Tiberius). They then concluded that Tacitus was more useful. This approach loses focus on the author in the question. A good comparison might be made with the *Res Gestae* and how Suetonius includes matters which Augustus preferred to leave out (e.g. Varus disaster or his less acceptable behaviour as a triumvir or the plots in Chapter 19).

There was, naturally, a focus on Augustus, with much time spent here; There was a limited focus on a second emperor (although a number chose to do more than two).

The usual opening paragraph about the limitations of Suetonius was not applied consistently later in the response. A common opening statement was that Suetonius belonged to the senatorial order; he was in fact an equestrian – thus arguments of senatorial bias were somewhat difficult to sustain. Responses did not appreciate the different genres and approaches of authors when comparing them.

In addition, some responses used Tacitus as a source for Gaius and the invasion of Britain in all questions.

If we are going to criticise Suetonius for using gossip, an example of it would be useful to make it convincing as evaluation.

Exemplar 2

		Suetonius is not very useful at describing the
		reign of Gaius more so than describing his insane
		character. Additionally, Suetonius would have held a
		personal bias against Gaius in his work as Suetonius
		was a senator, and Gaius was cruel to Senators,
		thus losing the favour of Suetonius.

Exemplar 2 is an example of a general evaluation of Suetonius as an author on the reign of Gaius. It identifies the focus on character which has been described in 4 examples (temples to himself, bridge at Baiae, senator killed by others with their pens, attempted invasion of Britain). These are valid responses but the paragraph does not specifically deal with these accounts. It offers a general view that as a senator he would be biased, so Suetonius is unfavourable to Gaius. Suetonius however, was not a senator but an equestrian (already stated in the opening sentence and now compounded in this evaluation). The passage highlights the issues with detached paragraphs of evaluation which do not deal with the content and the need for accurate factual knowledge of the context, genre and agenda of the author. It also undermines the information given by starting "Suetonius is not very useful..." implying that the information given is not valid.

Question 3

3 Read the interpretation below.

How convincing do you find Beard's interpretation that 'Augustus appears to have abolished nothing'?

You must use your knowledge of the historical period and the ancient sources you have studied to analyse and evaluate Beard's interpretation. [20]

It is important in this question to read the extract carefully and deal with the phraseology of the extract, and not rephrase it in some minor or major way.

Responses which dealt with what Beard actually wrote and assessed the points with close attention to the text were clearly going to score well. They supported their views with precise knowledge of the context and details of this debate.

There were, therefore, difficulties for candidates in not using the quote from the question in full, usually excluding 'appears' but focusing on 'abolished nothing'; this led to the view that the analysis argues the Beard is wrong since Augustus did abolish things, not all of which were constitutional (e.g. adultery, Antony and Cleopatra, the Civil War, books of prophecies).

The extract mentions privileges of the Senate which was translated in responses to powers. Therefore, the reduction in the Senate's roll was treated as a diminution of power rather than a possible enhanced status. Good responses had examples of Augustus' new regulations on the Senate which may be seen as enhancement. Many responses pointed to the rise in the qualification making it more elite, or the rules of attendance and speaking giving it more respect. More relevant, but needed developing, was the change in the organisation of provinces as a change in privilege rather than power.

Less success was gained when responses explained Augustus' settlements as if this was a question asking 'did Augustus restore the Republic?'

It was not always clear in responses what they understood by Beard's 'governing class'. The 'old offices of state' was not always addressed well; candidates focused on how they were elected under control of Augustus. That formal powers were voted by the Senate was countered by the fact that he had a *consilium* which he controlled. Some of these arguments lost focus on what Beard was saying.

Misconceptions (about how republican his powers were) was noticed in responses claiming the tribune was new or *imperium* was unprecedented or the title of pro-consul was new.

Good responses supported their views with reference to specific knowledge of Augustus' practice whether they argued the view was or was not convincing. A sense of the background was present in the majority of responses – Caesar's murder, the danger of appearing like a king, the traditional Roman loyalty to the Republic, all found favour in the responses and served well for candidates.

Good responses showed an understanding that Augustus had to be circumspect given the assassination of Caesar. Good responses developed the importance of maintaining relations with the upper class, which formed the basis of an appreciation of the points in the extract relating to 'appears'; in addition, the extent to which he really did abolish some things if not in name but in reality, was convincingly argued. Concepts such as 'illusion', 'façade' were commonly found in good analyses.

The detail of Augustus' power/roles/titles and how they were acquired was variable – in better responses there was a clear knowledge of the evidence in Dio, while weaker ones claimed Suetonius as the source. The episode of Augustus resigning and receiving his powers in 23 BC after an illness is claimed to have been in Suetonius who tells us he 'forced' the Senate (presumably section 28 which says no such thing).

Section B overview

Question 4 required candidates to assess and evaluate the extract with a view to the reasons for Caesar's assassination; most candidates had sufficient knowledge to support their assessments; however, it varied in detail and relevance. Questions 5 and 6 asked candidates to assess a statement on a specific issue. There was some attempt to deal with the issue in the question marginally and focus on other issues without giving some depth to the central issue in the question. Question 5 was by far the more popular option.

Question 4

SECTION B: The Breakdown of the Late Republic, 88–31 BC

4 Read the passage below.

How useful is this passage for understanding why Caesar was assassinated?

[12]

The main points generally discussed and analysed for the question were: dictator for life (monarchy, tyranny) in virtually all responses, similarly the lack of bodyguard and honours, the arrogance and extravagance/honours making him odious etc was mentioned fairly often; equally well referenced was the role of 'enemies' and the 'grievances', the only option – nothing with which he could be charged – in some but not most.

Supporting knowledge in most responses sensibly included; the hatred of kings and prevalence of assassination as a weapon in Roman politics; the ease with which his assassins could attack him and his lack of defence; evidence of resentment (grievances) among his class – Brutus and Cassius named; his use of *Clementia* humiliating to the patricians; the hatred he created with the 1st Triumvirate; the idea of 'liberty' (Brutus' *denarius*). Occasionally references were made usefully to Suetonius' account to support the accuracy of Plutarch's version (for example regarding the honours or the number of assassins).

Evaluation of the passage as reliable evidence was sometimes a general passage on Plutarch's background indicating he did research or had access to evidence; alternatively there was a view that he was a moralist so that his biographies were constructed with an agenda; some noted the influence of the genre of biography rather than history (quoting Plutarch's words); the key issue was to link the comments to the specific points in the passage (e.g. whether the 'motives' suggested had any basis in fact or whether the portrait of Caesar was negative due to his view of his character as from the start aiming at domination (Plutarch *Caesar* 4)).

Some responses, instead of dealing with what the sources says and how useful it is/what it tells us, spent time on what it does not say (for example, not naming the conspirators or their status); if the source is limited in information that may be explained with brief reference to other evidence but a lengthy paragraph on other 'reasons for assassination' is not dealing with the extract itself.

One misconception was that Plutarch was a contemporary source for Caesar's assassination. This shows again how important it is that the author's background, genre, style of writing and agenda, whatever that is, is fully understood by candidates.

Question 5

5* 'Politicians achieved success as a result of their military commands.' How far do you agree with this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [36]

The question asked candidates to assess the level of success achieved by politicians through military commands, indeed whether or not success was achieved through military commands. Developing the explanation into the extent of success was largely an issue with meeting criteria for well-developed judgements; there were a number of responses which did deal with commands in depth, thoroughly examining the whole career of a politician e.g. Pompey, Caesar or Octavian. These assessed the relative importance of commands in the context of the political activity of the times.

Some very good responses dealt with the idea of success and linked the individual's success to military command assessing the extent to which it was responsible for that success. This allowed for a more thematic rather than narrative approach. However, in other responses it was asserted that there was success without evidence, again not meeting the criteria relating to 'substantiated conclusions'.

Chronology and knowledge of sequence of events leads to convincing conclusions while limited range and lack of an overview of the period leads to unsubstantiated and unconvincing conclusions. Thoroughness is a key element in the criteria for higher marks.

An example is Pompey's career which when tied to specific events and actions, thoroughly developed and supported led to good or very good responses. This then led to a sound and convincing judgement on the extent to which his military commands related to specific success in a number of essays. However, in some responses, the conclusion was asserted that Pompey's commands in the 60s led to success. It was not always taken to a logical conclusion based on the evidence. Dio makes it clear in 62 BC that Pompey, despite success in the east, did not achieve what he wanted and had to resort to help from Crassus and Caesar. Further the point might be made that it was because of his commands that he was included in alliance. The claim made in responses was invariably (even erroneously) that he did have political success as a result of the Eastern command without a thorough or logical development. In a reasonable number of responses Pompey's career was confined to the 60s, ignoring the commands of the 80s and 70s which led to considerable success at the time and his commands in 50s and during the Civil War.

Good responses developed the issue of success to a certain extent while very good ones dealt in detail with the evidence and the events thoroughly. Cicero was treated as an example of success without commands (although few were aware of his brief command in Cilicia); however, again accounts stopped at 63 BC and ignored his exile and humiliation in 50s as well as his failure to stop Antony and Octavian.

The issue here was a lack of knowledge of the period as a whole, with responses often going no further than the 50s.

Many responses approached the question in chronological order or focused on individual politicians separately – this can lead to responses being somewhat narrative and reduce the opportunity for more in depth analysis. More analytical responses that attain higher marks tend to approach the question thematically.

Some responses approached this question as a way to deal with other factors after a short discussion of one general e.g. Sulla or Caesar without assessing the role of military commands in any depth.

Evaluation, which often consisted of lengthy paragraphs of description of an author's genre and methodology, serves little purpose. An example is describing Suetonius' penchant for gossip in relation to a statement of fact such as his revision of the roll of the Senate or victory at Actium. This does not evaluate the information; evaluation needs to be tied to opinion and speculation rather than factual statement unless there is some supported doubt as to their reliability.

A misconception is that Plutarch is the source for Sulla's reforms – he does not detail them. Appian (1.100) does briefly.

Exemplar 3

While military commands were extremely important for politicians to achieve success during the republic there were also many other factors.

In the 60s BC Pompey was given Lex Gabinia and Lex Manilia by the senate. Lex Gabinia was a command against the pirates were Pompey was given huge command for 3 years. During this time he defeated the pirates in the mediterranean and restored Rome's grain supply, winning him huge popularity with the plebs. During Lex Manilia, he was given the same

Exemplar 3 is an example of a response which changes the focus of Question 5 in order to include a variety of other factors the candidate wanted to discuss rather than deal in detail with the specific issue in the question (link between success and military commands). Information on Pompey covers only the 60s, and fails to deal with his career as a whole in relation to his commands and the extent of success. The majority of the response dealt with other factors (amicitia, oratory, propaganda, violence) without linking these to the issue. The examination of other ways to success is partially valid. However, the higher marks can only be achieved by a focus on the terms of the question.

Question 6

6* 'Economic problems caused the breakdown of the Republic.' How far do you agree with this view?

You must use and analyse the ancient sources you have studied as well as your own knowledge to support your answer. [36]

There were fewer responses to this question. The question required an examination of the scale of economic problems and their effects on the politics of the period; the issue concerned the underlying problems and the extent to which they contributed to the fall of the Republic. The issue relates to how far there were serious weaknesses in the economic structure which allowed others to take advantage. This aspect (leading to a breakdown) needed to be underpinned by detail and evidence. Generalised paragraphs on the increase in slaves and the movement to cities of the unemployed, the rise of the *plebs urbanus* (variously spelled) as a tool of politicians were less convincing as explanations.

There were a few excellent responses which focused on the problems rather than the period as a narrative of a series of problems. Responses also focused on the issues involved in the breakdown of the Republic and linked them to the economic problems. The analytical approach served them well.

Good responses identified specific issues of the economy which impacted on politics in some way or other. One common example was the Catilinarian Conspiracy which raised the issue of debt (caused by a number of factors – the cost of food, housing, need for electoral expenses, lack of employment and so on). Good support was found in Cicero's 2nd oration and Sallust (Catiline's speech). It was a little disappointing that Sallust's introduction to the Conspiracy was not used more widely and in detail. Manlius' letter was quoted infrequently also despite it being central to the issue. This was a good example of a politician exploiting economic problems for his own gain.

Other good references were to the use of the grain subsidy by various politicians notably Clodius. However, details were lacking in most cases, and little use was made of Sulla's abolition of it and the reasons for that (to stop politicians taking advantage). In the same way responses did not look at the trouble then caused by agitation for its reinstatement in the 70s.

Good responses displayed a good understanding of the limited evidence for economic problems and very good responses consistently linked the problems to the effect on politics and the eventual breakdown of the Republic. These were, for example, specific on the manipulation of the demands of the urban plebs and how these played into the politics of individuals. An example is the issue of land (especially for veterans in Pompey's case). Good responses could point to a number of efforts to distribute land and the reasons why it was an issue. However, the Gracchi are not included in the specification and not good support. It is questionable how far the generalised narrative of the problems caused by the falloff of Carthage helps the argument. Some brief reference to these background issue can be useful but not a page or more.

Some responses gave a paragraph on the general malaise of Roman economy before dealing with a various list of factors which brought down the Republic.

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