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## *Towards a Historical Approach to Translation in Translator Education*

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**Keywords**

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*Bibliographies of translation;*  
*Connection between translation history and translation practice;*  
*Historical dimension of translation;*  
*Objectives of a translation history course;*  
*Translation didactics*

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**Abstract**

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*Academic programs across disciplines often require a foundational knowledge of history as an essential component for earning degrees in various areas of expertise. In the context of translation programs, the history of translation may either be offered as a distinct and separate course or integrated into practical translation courses. Since the 1980s, scholars in the field of translation have recognized the significance of historical research and have actively developed methods and theoretical approaches to establish this as a discipline in its own right. Presently, there is an abundance of material on the history of translation, accompanied by a concerted effort to construct a historiography specific to the field. Despite the vast array of bibliographic resources available, one notable lacuna in Translation Studies pertains to effectively introducing the historical dimension of translation to students who may grapple with comprehending this extensive body of theoretical knowledge and understanding the contribution of a historical approach to the act of translating. This article seeks to illuminate strategies for familiarizing students with the historical dimension of translation within the framework of a translation history course. The overarching aim is to underscore how translation history can contribute to students' development of a robust theoretical background on the translation phenomenon while enhancing their practical skills. Additionally, the paper explores the potential resistance students may harbour toward the perceived utility of a historical approach in addressing practical translation issues. Furthermore, the discussion delves into the role of Bibliographies of Translation Studies, which collate scholarly publications on translation, as comprehensive academic tools essential for systematizing existing yet often fragmented knowledge in this specific scientific domain. The research methodology employed is theoretical exploration, focusing on concepts such as history and historical research in translation, the objectives of a translation history course, and the design of course content along with methods for assessing student performance. The fundamental conclusion drawn is that the historical approach to translation is intricately connected to the act of translating, emphasizing the need to integrate translation history into translator training at higher education institutions. The recommendation is to offer translation history as a standalone course within translator training programs, featuring clearly defined goals and a strong orientation toward the practical aspects of translation. The envisioned objective of a "History of Translation" course is not only to address students' knowledge gaps but also to instill curiosity and research skills, fostering a lifelong learning mindset crucial for translation practice. Such an approach is anticipated to cultivate a "translation culture" among learners, contributing to the development of their self-awareness and enhancing their standing as professionals in the translation industry.*

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**Mots clés**

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*Bibliographies de la traduction;*  
*Didactique de la traduction;*  
*Dimension historique de la traduction;*  
*Lien entre histoire de la traduction et pratique de la traduction;*  
*Objectifs d'un cours d'histoire de la traduction*

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**Résumé**

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*Dans certains programmes de traduction, l'histoire de la traduction figure en tant que cours distinct et séparé, tandis que dans d'autres, elle est intégrée à d'autres cours de traduction. Bien qu'il existe une variété de documents bibliographiques sur l'histoire de la traduction, l'une des questions abordées dans le domaine des études de traduction a été de savoir comment présenter l'aspect historique de la traduction aux étudiants qui pourraient rencontrer des difficultés à comprendre cet aspect. L'article présent tente d'éclairer la manière de familiariser les étudiants à la dimension historique de la traduction dans le cadre d'un cours d'histoire de la traduction. L'objectif général de cet article est de souligner la contribution de l'histoire de la traduction pour aider les étudiants à développer à la fois une solide formation théorique sur le phénomène de la traduction et à améliorer leurs compétences pratiques. La méthodologie appliquée dans la recherche présente et d'explorer sur une base théorique les questions suivantes : les concepts d'histoire et de recherche historique sur la traduction, les objectifs d'un cours d'histoire de la traduction, le contenu du cours et les méthodes d'évaluation des étudiants. En outre, l'article présent discute du rôle des bibliographies de traductologie, en tant qu'outils académiques les plus complets basés sur la nécessité de systématiser les connaissances existantes mais souvent fragmentées dans un domaine scientifique spécifique. La conclusion fondamentale est que l'approche historique de la traduction est étroitement liée à l'acte de traduire ; il est donc essentiel d'intégrer l'histoire de la traduction dans le cadre de la formation des traducteurs aux établissements d'enseignement supérieur. Une telle approche aiderait certainement les apprenants à développer ce qu'on appelle la « culture de la traduction » qui contribuerait à développer leur conscience de soi et à améliorer leur statut de professionnels dans le secteur de la traduction.*

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المملخص	الكلمات المفتاحية
<p>متخصصو الترجمة مدركون لأهمية البحث التاريخي، وخاضوا في تحديد الأساليب والمناهج النظرية المناسبة لهذا التخصص الجديد. وعلى الرغم من وجود مجموعة واسعة من المواد البيولوجرافية حول تاريخ الترجمة، إلا أن أحد الأسئلة الرئيسية التي تم تناولها في مجال دراسات الترجمة - والتي لم تحظ باهتمام كبير- تكمن في كيفية تقديم الجانب التاريخي للترجمة للطلاب الذين قد يجدون صعوبة في فهم هذا الجانب. يحاول هذا المقال تسليط الضوء على كيفية تعريف الطلاب بالبعد التاريخي للترجمة في إطار مقرر تاريخ الترجمة. كما أن الهدف العام من هذه المقالة هو تسليط الضوء على مساهمة تاريخ الترجمة في مساعدة الطلاب على تطوير خلفية نظرية قوية حول ظاهرة الترجمة وتحسين مهاراتهم العلمية. إن المنهجية المطبقة في هذا البحث هي استكشاف الأسئلة التالية على أساس نظري: مفاهيم التاريخ والبحث التاريخي حول الترجمة، أهداف المقرر في تاريخ الترجمة، محتوى المقرر وطرق تقييم الطلاب. علاوة على ذلك، يناقش هذا المقال دور البيولوجرافيات في دراسات الترجمة، أي البيولوجرافيات التي تجمع بين المنشورات العلمية والأكاديمية التي تتناول الترجمة، باعتبارها الأدوات الأكاديمية الأكثر اكتمالا والقائمة على الحاجة إلى تنظيم المعرفة الموجودة ولكن الجزأة في كثير من الأحيان في مجال علمي محدد. وفي الأخير، فإن البحث يخلص إلى أن النهج التاريخي للترجمة يرتبط ارتباطا وثيقا بالترجمة ذاتها، ولذلك، فمن الضروري دمج تاريخ الترجمة في تدريب المترجمين في مؤسسات التعليم العالي. ومن المؤكد ان مثل هذا النهج من شأنه أن يساعد المتعلمين على تطوير ما يسمى ب"ثقافة الترجمة" التي من شأنها ان تساعد على تطوير وعيهم الذاتي وتحسين وضعهم بصفقتهم محترفين في قطاع الترجمة.</p>	<p>الترجمة؛ البعد التاريخي؛ للترجمة؛ تاريخ الترجمة؛ ممارسة الترجمة؛ أهداف دورة تاريخ الترجمة</p>

## 1. Introduction

The concept of history is interrelated to the concept of translation from two different angles: the contribution of translation to the interpretation and an in-depth understanding of various aspects of history, in particular of cultural practices such as religion, politics, linguistics and literature and in turn, the contribution of history toward the understanding of the various forms of translation such as translation as a process, translation as a product, translation as an institution, theory of translation etc. Although both approaches are interesting enough to be studied on their own, the present research will focus on the second one, which is the importance of studying history to the understanding of the different aspects of translation since the aim of the study is to shed



light on the function of a historical approach to translation in the framework of translator training.

A significant distinction which is closely related to the present research is the distinction among the concepts *history*, *historiography* and *metahistoriography* that are defined by D'hulst (2010) as follows:

*History*: “the proper sequence of facts, events, ideas, discourses” as well as “an oral or written mode of presentation of these facts, events etc.” (p.307).

*Historiography*: “the history of histories” and by extension as “the history of various intellectual practices such as linguistics, literature, sciences etc.” (p.307). In this sense, historiography has evolved as an academic field that combines historical concepts and methods.

*Metahistoriography*: “the extensive reflection on the concepts and methods of writing history as well as to the methodological difficulties that are related to the use of these concepts and methods” (p.307). More specifically, it is concerned with issues such as: a. “time” that deals with the concepts of “century”, “age” and “period” which are used for periodization as well as with the problems that these concepts raise, b. “space” that deals with the concepts used for space division such as “regional”, “national”, “European”, “Western” etc., c. “format” that deals with the different forms in which a research object is presented such as a timetable, a description, a narrative etc.

It should be emphasized that historical research makes up a multifaceted discipline and as such the integration of all three historical levels in a single historical approach entails certain difficulties. More precisely, there are certain practical limitations that restrain the historian by an integrated approach to history such as availability of research time, availability of experts and, mostly, availability of research material.

## 2. The research object of translation history

Translation Studies focus on the formal objects and historical viewpoints of historiography since the set of material objects of translation historiography is virtually identical to the different objects such as translation theory, translator training or translation communication processes that are investigated by all branches of translation research. Within this context, translation history explores the following research fields:

- Historical research on the translator who is viewed through different angles such as his training, educational and social background as well as his cultural profile. On the contrary, little research has been conducted on translation scholars since few biographies and monographs have been issued except for some key figures in the field of Translation Studies.
- Historical research on what has been translated and what has not, as well as the selection criteria and certain procedures that have been used for texts to be translated.



- Historical research on what has been written on translation and what are the fields of reflection on translation which a certain culture and historical period promotes such as translation theories, translation criticism and prefaces among those which are the most commonly studied. For instance, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century translation theory approaches have been prominent in historical research to the spectacular worldwide development and spread of Translation Studies as an autonomous discipline.
- Historical research on where translations have been written, printed, published and distributed and by whom (specific publishers and specific series). Chan (2004) observes that the question of “where” translations have been translated cannot be answered by simply referring to single national traditions since models for language and translation learning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on spread over different cultures, undergoing changes or merging with indigenous ones.
- Historical research on the support that translators and publishers receive and the impact of this support on the translator’s work. It also addresses issues related to the role of network structures among publishers, authors and translators.
- Historical research on why translations occur in a specific way regarding their form and function. Indeed, the causality and effects relation has been one of the major theoretical research topics in Translation Studies. Another research question that is raised involves the exploration of the conditions under which a type of theoretical approach to translation has become more popular than others.
- Historical research on how translations are made and what are the basic norms that characterize the act of translating. Particular attention has also been paid to changes of translation norms both in time and in space.
- Historical research on translator education issues and the development of translator training institutions.
- Historical research on the origins of translation and the modes of temporal classification of translations since bibliographies and databases contribute considerably to the exploration of patterns of translation in different periods in history.



- Historical research on translation as a social event and the translator's role as a "social mediator".

Among the issues to be explored are the translator as member of complex social networks as well as his function as a "transmitter" of cultural and ideological messages. According to Simeoni (1983) such matters concern the translator's mediating role between cultures and the study of the translation as a complicated communication instance.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1 Teaching the history of translation***

Translation history has been one of the subdisciplines in which there has been an increased interest in recent years. Since the 1980s translation theorists have stressed the importance of an historical approach to translation and have begun to explore and establish methods and theoretical models for this academic area.

The increasing interest in the history of translation has led to the establishment of the historiography of translation and the collection of abundant material on translation history. However, there has been little research on how to initiate students of translation to a historical approach to translation and, mostly, how to help them realize that historical research is related to the actual practice of translation. Indeed, the relevance of theoretical courses on history of translation is often questioned by students of translation considering them to be removed from the needs of the real world and the act of translating.

#### ***3.2 Objectives***

History of translation is incorporated into the curriculum of translator training programs either as a separate course or as a historical approach integrated into other translation courses. The first task in designing a separate translation history course is to set the objectives of the course and make students realize right from the start of their training the necessity of studying history of translation since they usually question the relevance of theoretical courses to their training. To this end, they could be asked to write a short description of their expectations of the course as well as their opinions toward the contribution of a historical approach of translation to their professional development.

One of the questions translation students often ask is why translators -in- training or even professionals who are mostly concerned with practical problems of translation to study history. Woodsworth (1996) who has discussed the importance of studying the past of translation provides the answer: "Or, for those whose primary goal is professional practice, because one ought to be familiar with the history of one's discipline in order to practice efficiently" (p.12).

Therefore, teachers of translation should set practically-oriented objectives of a translation history course such as to make students reflect on both theory and practice at once and consider the direct link between theoretical ideas and the practice of translation. The basic question that should be raised is to what extent the



translator's theoretical stance is depicted in his actual translations. Moreover, their reflection on the link between the present and past of the profession would help them develop their critical ability which is considered to be one of the most significant competences for the translator's profession. One objective would be to teach research conducting techniques so that students develop research skills and a capacity for life-long learning since the "information mining skill" as defined by the EMT (European Masters in Translation) Competence Framework is nowadays one of the most important skills in the professional world of translation industry. Benmouhoub (2018) mentions characteristically: "students are expected to acquire the necessary skills that will help them question the things around them and act critically in their academic and professional career" (p.116).

Another practically-oriented objective could be to make students consider the process of translation in its sociological and cultural context as Alenezi (2021) states: "recognizing the differences between the ST and TL cultures at different levels is important for learners who seek to become translators" (p.17). The so-called Cultural Turn that has taken place in Translation Studies in the late 90's has opened doors to the historical approach of translation, examining the extent to which translation activities are related to ideological and intellectual projects and how they are linked to historical movements. Within this framework, the study of translation history would have practical value functioning as a key to the understanding of the sociocultural nature of translation and the translator's role as an ideological "transformer".

### 3.3 Course Content

Bearing these objectives in mind, the course could start by introducing the main term *history of translation* entailing the history of both the practice and the theory of translation. At theoretical level some questions to be raised would be the following: who were the translators, what types of texts did they translate and under what circumstances, how have translators conceptualized their work and, mostly, how have translators been evaluated at different periods of history. At practical level, it would be possible to reflect on how theoretical ideas are related to the practice of translation and to what extent the translator's theoretical background is reflected on his actual translations.

The significance of the cultural aspects of translation could be an integral component of a translation history course. Indeed, Chouit (2019) stresses that "the differences between the source culture and the target culture may create tough obstacles for the translators" (p.73). When it comes to texts with strong cultural references, teachers of translation history could help students realise that translation is not a simple transfer from one linguistic register to another but an encounter of two languages and cultures.

As far as the way of presenting history is concerned, in modern historiography there has been an acceptance of multiple historical models according to which the study of history does not necessarily mean starting at the beginning and moving chronologically down through the centuries to the present. However, two categories that are mostly used



as dividing lines regarding the study of history are obviously “time” and “space”. The study of history can be broken into with spacial (the study of translation in certain space such as a certain country or continent) or historical criteria (the study of translation at a given historical period such as the Middle Ages).

A proposal would be to study history chronologically, using the periodization traditional in Western scholarship: Ancient Era, the Middle Ages, the Rise of the West, the Renaissance and The Present. Giving dates and characteristics for each of these periods and analyzing the translation activities that have taken place at the particular periods would help the teacher of translation systematize the course content. Bible translation would be a main topic to be covered at this course accompanied by a discussion of translation in other religious traditions with which students are quite unfamiliar.

An overview of the vital role that translators have played through the ages would also help students of translation realize the contribution of translators in the development of languages, shaping national identities and forming cultures.

- **Ancient Era**

The course could start with the Ancient Era and the exploration of the Bible translation from Hebrew to Greek as the first translation work of great importance. While the translation of the Bible during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century was a major work, already in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century discussions were made about the work of human translators as cultural mediators during the time of Terence, a famous Roman playwright. The contribution of Cicero, a Greek-Latin translator, who believed that translation should not be “verbum pro verbum” (word for word) and that the translator’s work is like an artist’s work could also be described in the history course. Another key-figure from antiquity that could be studied is the translator, scholar and Buddhist monk, Kumarajiva since his translation work has greatly influenced Buddhism in China due to its contextual rendering, making the translation more straightforward.

- **The Middle Ages**

Some of the great moments or particularly productive periods of translation history that occurred in Toledo, Bagdad and medieval France and England can be discussed. In particular, the history course could stress the important contribution of Toledo School of Translators in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries where translators came from different parts of Europe to work on the translation of medical, scientific, religious and philosophical works into Castilian and Latin from Greek, Arabic and Hebrew. Roger Bacon could be mentioned as a 13<sup>th</sup> century linguist to assess that a translator should know well both the source and the target language and also have knowledge of the discipline of the work he is assigned to. Furthermore, Geoffrey Chaucer could be discussed as the founder in the 14<sup>th</sup> century of an English poetic tradition based on translations of literary works in languages that were more established than English such as Latin and Italian.



- **The Renaissance**

In this history course it could be stressed how the Renaissance was linked to the spread of humanistic ideas throughout Europe and how translation played an important role in the interconnected relations that formed European culture. The course should look closely at translations at that time and how they paved the way to this period of rebirth for civilization. To this context, it could emphasize the role of translation scholars of that period who adapted text “sense for sense” rather than “word for word” approach in order to retain meaning. An example of a Renaissance translator is the German linguist Albrecht von Eyb who translated the works of the Roman playwright Plautus. Also, Joachim du Bellay, the poet and translator of Ovid’s poems and Etienne Dolet who was put to the stake due to his sense-to-sense translation of Socrates’ utterances are two key-figures that must be studied. It should be pointed out that the greatest achievement in the Renaissance period involving translation was the different approach to portraying the source language, an approach which has been adopted in modern Translation Studies with translators considering mostly the meaning of the source language before rendering it to the target language.

- **The Rise of the West**

The development of printing and the growth in the middle class during the 16th century further brought translation to the foreground as the need for new literary materials increased. It was also the first time that the portion of the Bible was directly translated from Greek to Hebrew texts into English. Several other translations of the bible were done during the 16<sup>th</sup> century which helped in the development of modern languages in Europe. This is also the period when the English scholar William Tyndale led a group working on the initial Tudor translation of the New Testament in 1525. In addition, the contribution of the theology professor Martin Luther who produced a German translation of the Bible claiming that one can achieve a good translation by translating only in his native language, could be described in a translation history course.

- **The Present**

Another main component of the course content could be an overview of the development of Translation Studies in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the advancement in the field of translator training. At this stage, the required skills for professional translators have been redefined, on the basis that translators are not simply professional linguists but, mostly, human beings who live and work in a particular society and, therefore, their work bears strong social responsibility. Also, the importance of technology which created a global market for language services and opened new opportunities for people who wish to study translation should be stressed. Finally, it is important to point out that in the second half of the twentieth century there had been various attempts to redefine concepts such as “literal” and “free” in operational terms and to put together systematic classifications of the translation phenomenon.



### 3.4 Teaching Material

Students could be motivated to study beyond the compulsory text material and explore extra material that would help them develop their research and critical skills. One useful teaching source could come from images of translators and the various monuments to their work. Indeed, visual images in the form of slides or illustrations are suggested in a translation history course that would clarify information taken by print sources in order to motivate students to attend the course. The role of translators throughout history can be depicted by visual aids that would also reveal that many of them have been punished, even executed or have been amply honored.

Students could study biographical elements of translators that have had through their work strong impact in the field of Translation Studies and compose a portrait of key-figures. This portrait could include, apart from certain biographical information, a description of the historical period within which they produced their work, the significance of their work for future generations and, most importantly, their beliefs concerning the multidimensional concept of translation. Students could also be asked to write and present a research paper on the cultural, social and ideological context of translations in different historical circumstances that would help them to develop more advanced research skills.

### 3.5 The Role of Bibliographies of Translation Studies

Bibliographies of Translation Studies have been a useful tool and an academic material in exploring the history of translation. Bibliographies together with historical surveys, encyclopedias, handbooks and journals are the most encompassing of all academic tools based on the need to systematize existing but often fragmented knowledge in a given area.

When talking about bibliographies of Translation Studies we refer to bibliographies gathering scholarly and academic publications that deal with translation and interpreting. The discipline of Translation Studies needed a systematizing tool already from the beginning of its history. Eugene Nida's *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) is considered to contain the first type of "bibliography" since in this work Nida introduced the bibliography as a tool "not only to provide the reader with data on the scores of books and articles cited in the text but also as a wide selection of source materials dealing with many distinct but ultimately related phases of translating" (p. 265). The sources mentioned by Nida relate to various disciplines that have influenced the discipline of Translation Studies such as linguistics, ideology, cultural studies, anthropology and theology.

In the early seventies the *International Bibliography of Translation* was published where more than 4600 titles were listed. These works are considered as the first attempts to comprise a general bibliography on Translation Studies. In addition, George Steiner (1998), in his detailed classification of the early history of translation theory, refers to fourteen authors who represent "very nearly the sum total of those who have said anything fundamental or new about translation" (p. 283). His list includes St Jerome, Luther, Dryden and Schleiermacher and also takes us into the twentieth century with Ezra Pound



and Walter Benjamin. Finally, there are online bibliographies, that make it possible to carry out extensive category search for authors, titles, series or languages of publication.

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The fact that the historical approach is strongly interwoven in modern approaches toward translation indicates the need to incorporate a separate translation history course and give an independent position to historical research in modern translator training courses. Indeed, history of translation has been integrated in most modern translator training programmes either as a distinct course or as part of another translation course. To this context, one of the issues that are explored in the field of translator education concerns translation history teaching and methods of introducing historical research to translation students.

The present article has attempted to raise questions related to the structure of an autonomous translation history course such as identifying objectives, designing the course content and developing student assessment methods. The article has also stressed the pedagogical difficulties teachers might encounter in making students realize why to study history in a translator training program and how it is actually connected to the practice of translation.

The main conclusion is that the overall purpose of a translation history course would be to help students understand past thinking, past practices as well as the translators' role in different historical eras. Indeed, the past is thought to contain "lessons" for the present and to help us avoid making the same mistakes and even predict future situations. Therefore, the study of the historical approach of translation would make students develop their awareness regarding their social role and this would certainly reinforce their self-image as professional translators.

More precisely, the objectives of a history course would be to sensitize students on the practical aspect of history on their training and, consequently, help them to adopt a positive opinion toward history of translation since one of the difficulties translation teachers may encounter involves students' negative attitude toward the usefulness of history to the practice of translation. It should be made clear at the initial stage of their training that the historical approach of translation does not constitute a component designed to provide academic prestige in translation programs but it aims at bridging the traditional gap between the theoretical and practical approach of the translation phenomenon.

Finally, it is hoped that the magnificent expansion of Translation Studies within academe will create room for further evolvement of the branch of translation history allowing for more variety in its object of research, objectives and methodology since according to Lambert (1992), "*Historians are needed more than ever before.*" (p.22)



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## Author Biodata

Dr. Saridaki comes from Greece and she was born in the city of Thessaloniki which is the second capital city of Greece. Dr. Saridaki holds a B.A. in English Language and Literature, a second B.A. in French Language and Literature (Aristotle University) and an M.A. in Translation (U.W.E, Bristol, U.K.). Her Ph.D. (Aristotle University, School of French, Department of Translation) is in Translation Studies, and, more specifically, in the field of translator training. Her doctoral dissertation investigates the role of translation theory to translator training and the interconnectivity between the theory and the practice of translation. At present she works as a Lecturer at University of Thessaly (City of Volos, Greece) in the Department of Language and Intercultural Studies where she teaches translation theory and its practical applications in the act of translating. Among her main



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academic interests are translation theory teaching, the cultural dimension of translation, the translator's social role and the effect of the translator's psychology on the act of translating.

### **Declaration of conflicting interest**

The author declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of the article.



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