

The Golden Legend or Lives Of The Saints
Compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 1275
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HERE BEGINNETH THE LIFE OF ISAAC, WITH THE HISTORY OF ESAY AND OF JACOB, WHICH IS READ IN THE CHURCH THE SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Caxton added this to his edition of the Golden Legend, but it was not a part of Voragine's original.

THE BIRTH AND YOUTH OF JACOB AND ESAU

Isaac was forty years old when he wedded Rebekah and she bare him no children. Wherefore he besought our Lord that she might conceive and bring forth fruit. Our Lord heard his prayer that she conceived of him and had twain sons at once, which two, ere they were born, fought oft in their mother's belly. For which cause she prayed God to counsel her and to give her comfort, which appeared and said to her: Two manner people be in thy belly, and two manner folk shall be divided from thy womb, people shall overcome people, and the more shall serve the less.

Thus said our Lord to her. After this, when time came that she should be delivered, there were twain to be born. The first that issued was rough from the head to the foot, and he was named Esau. And forthwith followed that other holding the plant [sole] of his brother's foot in his hand, and he was named Jacob. Isaac the father was sixty years old when these children were born.

And after this, when they were grown to reasonable age, Esau became a ploughman, and a tiller of the earth, and an hunter. And Jacob was simple [unpretentious] and dwelled at home with his mother. Isaac the father loved well Esau, because he ate oft of the venison that Esau took, and Rebekah the mother loved Jacob.

Jacob on a time had made a good pottage, and Esau his brother had been an hunting all day and came home sore an hungred [very hungry], and found Jacob having good pottage, and prayed him to give him some, for he was weary and much hungry. To whom Jacob said: If thou wilt sell to me thy patrimony and heritage I shall give thee some pottage.

And Esau answered, Lo! I die for hunger, what shall avail me mine inheritance if I die, and what shall profit me my patrimony? I am content that thou take it for this pottage.

Jacob then said: Swear that to me thou shalt never claim it, and that thou art content I shall enjoy it, and Esau sware it, and so sold away his patrimony, and took the pottage and ate it, and went his way, setting nothing thereby that he had sold his patrimony. This aforesaid is to bring in my matter of the history that is read, for now followeth the legend as it is read in the church.

ISAAC'S BLESSING

Isaac began to wax old and his eyes failed and dimmed that he might not clearly see. And on a time he called Esau his oldest son and said to him: Son mine!

Which answered: Father, I am here ready.

To whom the father said: Behold that I wax old and know not the day that I shall die and depart out of this world, wherefore take thine harness, thy bow and quiver with tackles, and go forth an hunting, and when thou hast taken any venison, make to me thereof such manner meat as thou knowest that I am wont to eat, and bring it to me that I may eat it, and that my soul may bless thee ere I die.

Which all these words Rebekah heard. And Esau went forth for to accomplish the commandment of his father, and she said then to Jacob: I have heard thy father say to Esau, thy brother: Bring to me of thy venison, and make thereof meat that I may eat, and that I may bless thee tofore our Lord ere I die. Now my son, take heed to my counsel, and go forth to the flock, and bring to me two the best kids that thou canst find, and I shall make of them meat such as thy father shall gladly eat, which when thou hast brought to him and hast eaten he may bless thee ere he die.

To whom Jacob answered: knowest thou not that my brother is rough and hairy and I am smooth? If my father take me to him and taste me and feel, I dread me that he shall think that I mock him, and shall give me his curse for the blessing.

The mother then said to him: In me, said she, be this curse, my son, nevertheless hear me; go to the flock and do that I have said to thee.

He went and fetched the kids and delivered them to his mother, and she went and ordained them into such meat as she knew well that his father loved, and took the best clothes that Esau had, and did them on Jacob. And the skins of the kids she did about his neck and hands there as he was bare, and delivered to him bread and the pulment [pottage] that she had boiled.

And he went to his father and said: Father mine!

And he answered: I am here; who art thou, my son?

Jacob said: I am Esau, thy first begotten son. I have done as thou commandedst me. Arise, sit and eat of the venison of my hunting that thy soul may bless me.

Then said Isaac again to his son: How mightest thou, said he, so soon find and take it, my son?

To whom he answered: It was the will of God that such thing as I desired came soon to my hand.

Isaac said to him: Come hither to me, my son, that I may touch and handle thee, that I may prove whether thou be my son Esau or not.

He came to his father, and when he had felt him, Isaac said: The voice truly is the voice of Jacob, but the hands be the hands of Esau.

And he knew him not, for his hands expressed the likeness and similitude of the more [older] brother. Therefore blessing him, he said to him: Thou art then my son Esau?

He answered and said: I am he.

Then said Isaac: Bring to me the meat of thine hunting, my son, that my soul may bless thee.

Which he offered and gave to his father, and also wine. And when he had eaten and drunken a good draught of the wine, he said to Jacob: Come hither to me, my son, and kiss me.

And he went to him and kissed him. Anon as he felt the sweet savour and smell of his clothes, blessing him he said: Lo! the sweet odour of my son is as the odour of a field full of flowers, whom our Lord bless. God give to thee of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, abundance of wheat, wine, and oil, and the people serve thee, and the tribes worship thee. Be thou lord of thy brethren, and the sons of thy mother shall bow down and kneel to thee. Whosoever curseth thee, be he accursed, and who that blesseth thee, with blessings be he fulfilled.

Unnethe [hardly] Isaac had fulfilled these words and Jacob gone out, when that Esau came with his meat that he had gotten with hunting, entered in, and offered to his father saying: Arise, father mine, and eat of the venison that thy son hath ordained for thee, that thy soul may bless me.

Isaac said to him: Who art thou?

To whom he answered, I am thy first begotten son Esau.

Isaac then was greatly abashed [surprised] and astonied, and marvelled more than can be thought credible. And then he was in a trance, as the master of histories saith, in which he had knowledge that God would [desired] that Jacob should have the blessing. And said to Esau: Who then was he that right now a little tofore thy coming brought to me venison? And I have eaten of all that he brought to me ere thou camest. I have blessed him, and he shall be blessed.

When Esau heard these words of his father, he cried with a great cry, and was sore astonied and said: Father, I pray thee bless me also.

To whom he said: Thy brother germain [son of the same two parents] is come fraudulently, and hath received thy blessing.

Then said Esau: Certainly and justly may his name be called well Jacob, for on another time tofore this he supplanted me of my patrimony, and now secondly he hath undernome [taken by stealth] from me my blessing. And yet then he said to his father: Hast thou not reserved to me one blessing?

Isaac answered: I have ordained him to be thy lord, I have subdued all his brethren to his servitude. I have stablished him in wheat, wine and oil. And after this what shall I do to thee, my son?

To whom Esau said: Hast thou not, father, yet one blessing? I beseech thee to bless me.

Then with a great sighing and weeping Isaac moved said to him: In the fatness of the earth and in the dew of heaven shall be thy blessing, thou shalt live in thy sword, and shalt serve thy brother.

Then was Esau woe-begone, and hated Jacob for supplanting him of his blessing that his father had blessed him with, and said in his heart: The days of sorrow shall come to my father, for I shall slay my brother Jacob.

This was told to Rebekah, which anon sent for Jacob her son, and said to him: Lo! Esau thy brother threateneth to slay thee, therefore now my son hear my voice and do as I shall counsel. Make thee ready and go to my brother in Aran, and dwell there with him unto the time that his anger and fury be overpast, and his indignation ceased, and that he forget such things that thou hast done to him, and then after that I shall send for thee, and bring thee hither again.

And Rebekah went to Isaac her husband and said: I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth, if Jacob take to him a wife of that kindred, I will no longer live.

JACOB SETS OUT FOR MESOPOTAMIA OF SYRIA

Isaac then called Jacob and blessed him and commanded to him saying: I charge thee in no wise to take a wife of the kindred of Canaan, but go and walk into Mesopotamia of Syria, unto the house of Bethuel, father of thy mother, and take to thee there a wife of the daughters of Laban thine uncle. God Almighty bless thee, and make thee grow and multiply, that thou mayst be increased into tourbes [crowds] of people, and give to thee the blessings of Abraham, and to thy seed after thee, that thou mayst possess and own the land of thy pilgrimage which he granted to thy grandsire.

When Isaac had thus said, and given him leave to go, he departed anon, and went into Mesopotamia of Syria to Laban, son of Bethuel, brother of Rebekah his mother. Esau seeing that his father had blessed Jacob and sent him into Mesopotamia of Syria to wed a wife there, and that after his blessing commanded to him saying: Take thou no wife of the daughters of Canaan; and he obeying his father went into Syria, proving thereby that his father saw not gladly the daughters of Canaan, he went to Ishmael and took him a wife beside them that he had taken tofore, that was Melech, daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham.

JACOB'S DREAM OF THE LADDER

Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went forth on his journey toward Aran. When he came to a certain place after going down of the sun and would rest there all night, he took of the stones that were there and laid under his head and slept in the same place. And there he saw in his sleep a ladder standing on the earth, and the upper end thereof touched heaven, and angels of God ascending and descending upon it, and our Lord in the midst of the ladder saying to him: I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and of Isaac; the land on which thou sleepest I shall give to thee and to thy seed, and thy seed shall be as dust of the earth; thou shalt spread abroad unto the east and unto the west, and north and south, and all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed in thee and in thy seed. And I shall be thy keeper wheresoever thou shalt go, and shall bring thee again into this land, and I shall not leave till I have accomplished all that I have said.

When Jacob was awaked from his sleep and dreaming, he said: Verily God is in this place, and I wist not of it. And he said dreadingly: How terrible is this place, none other thing is here but the house of God and the gate of heaven. Then Jacob arose early and took the stone that lay under his head, and raised it for witness, pouring oil thereon, and called the name of the place Bethel which tofore was called Luza. And there he made a vow to our Lord, saying: If God be with me and keep me in the way that I walk, and give me bread to eat, and clothes to cover me, and I may return prosperously into the house of my father, the Lord shall be my God, and this stone that I have raised in witness, this shall be called the house of God. And the good of all things that thou givest to me, I shall offer to thee the tithes and tenth part.

JACOB MEETS RACHEL

Then Jacob went forth into the east, and saw a pit in a field and three flocks of sheep lying by it, for of that pit were the beasts watered. And the mouth thereof was shut and closed with a great stone, for the custom was when all the sheep were gathered, they rolled away the stone, and when they had drunken they laid the stone again at the pit mouth. And then he said to the shepherds: Brethren, whence are ye?

Which answered: Of Aran.

Then he asking them said: Know ye not Laban, son of Nahor? They said: We know him well.

How fareth he, said he, is he all whole?

He fareth well, said they; and lo! Rachel his daughter cometh there with her flock.

Then said Jacob: It is yet far to even; it is yet time that the flocks be led to drink, and after be driven to pasture.

Which answered: We may not so do till all the beasts be gathered, and then we remove the stone from the mouth of the pit and water our beasts.

And as they talked, Rachel came with the flock of her father, for she kept that time the beasts. And when Jacob saw her and knew that she was his eme's [uncle's] daughter, and that they were his eme's sheep, he removed the stone from the pit's mouth, and when her sheep had drunken, he kissed her, and weeping he told her that he was brother to her father and son of Rebekah. Then she hied her [went] and told it to her father, which when he understood that Jacob, his sister's son was come, he ran against [to] him and, embracing, kissed him, and led him into his house. And when he had heard the cause of his journey he said: Thou art my mouth and my flesh.

JACOB MARRIES RACHEL AND LEAH

And when he had been there the space of a month, he demanded Jacob if he would gladly serve him because he was his cousin, and what hire and reward he would have. He had two daughters, the more [older] was named Leah, and the less [younger] was called Rachel, but Leah was blear-eyed [bleary-eyed, with eyes dim from water], and Rachel was fair of visage and well-favoured, whom Jacob loved, and said: I shall serve thee for Rachel thy younger daughter seven years.

Laban answered: It is better that I give her to thee than to a strange [foreign] man; dwell and abide with me, and thou shalt have her. And so Jacob served him for Rachel seven years, and him thought it [it seemed to him] but a little while, because of the great love that he had to her. And at the end of seven years, Jacob said to Laban: Give to me my wife, for the time is come that I should have her.

Then Laban called all his friends and made a feast for the wedding, and at night he brought in Leah, the more daughter, and delivered to her an handmaid named Zilpah. Then Jacob, weening that it had been Rachel, went to her as the manner is, and when the morning came and he saw that it was Leah, he said to Laban her father: What hast thou done? Have I not served thee for Rachel, why hast thou brought Leah to me?

Laban answered: It is not the usage ne custom of our country to give the younger first to be wedded, but fulfil and make an end of this complement [ceremony] and marriage this week, and then shall I give to thee Rachel my daughter for other seven years that thou shalt serve to me.

Jacob agreed gladly, and when that week was passed, he wedded Rachel to his wife. To whom Laban her father gave an handmaid named Bilhah. Nevertheless when the wedding of the younger was finished, because of the great love that he had to her, him thought that the other seven years were but short.

JACOB'S CHILDREN

Our Lord saw that he despised Leah. He let Leah conceive, and Rachel her sister abide barren, which then Leah bare a son and named him Reuben, saying: Our Lord God hath beholden mine humility and meekness, now shall mine husband love me.

She conceived yet and bare another son, and said, "Because our Lord saw me despised he hath given to me this son." And she called him Simeon.

She conceived the third, and brought forth another son, and said, "Now shall my husband be coupled to me, because I have born to him three sons." And she called his name Levi.

She conceived the fourth son and was delivered of him, and said, "Now I shall knowledge me [give thanks] to our Lord." And therefore she named him Judah, and then she ceased of bearing of children.

Rachel, seeing herself barren, had envy to her sister and said to Jacob her husband: Make me with child or else I shall die.

To whom Jacob was wroth, and answered: What! weenest thou that I were God and hath prived from thee the fruit of thy belly?

Then she said, I have my servant Bilhah, go unto her, and let her conceive of thee on my knees, that I may have of her some sons.

She gave Bilhah unto her husband to know her, which when Jacob had known, she conceived and bare a son. Then said Rachel, "Our Lord hath heard my petition giving to me a son," and she named him Dan.

After that Bilhah conceived again and bare another son, for whom Rachel said, "Our Lord hath compared me to my sister and I have availed." And she named him Naphtali.

Then Leah feeling that she conceived no more, she gave Zilpah her handmaid to her husband, which conceived and bare a son whom Leah named Gad. After Zilpah conceived and bare another son, for whom Leah said, "This is for my blessedness, and certainly all generations shall say that I am blessed." Therefore she called him Asher.

It happed that Reuben went out in harvest time into the field, and took there a mandrake which he brought and gave to his mother. Then Rachel said to her sister Leah: Give me some part of the mandrake of thy son.

Leah answered: Is it not enough to take from me my husband, but that also thou wilt have part of the mandrake of my son?

Then said Rachel: He shall sleep with thee this night for the mandrake of thy son.

At even, when Jacob came home from the field, Leah went against [to] him and said to him: Thou shalt this night sleep with me, for I have bought thee for the meed of the mandrake of my son.

He slept with her that night, and our Lord heard her prayers. She conceived and brought forth the fifth son, and she said: "God hath rewarded me because I gave my handmaid to my husband." She called his name Issachar.

Yet Leah conceived and bare the sixth son and said, "God hath endowed me with a good dower, yet shall my husband abide with me because I have borne to him six sons." And she called his name Zebulon.

After this she conceived and bare a daughter named Dinah. Then our Lord remembered Rachel and heard her and opened the place of conception, which conceived and bare a son, saying, "The Lord hath taken away mine opprobrium and shame," and named his name Joseph, saying, "I pray God to send me another."

JACOB RETURNS TO CANAAN

When Joseph was born, Jacob said to Laban his wives' father: Give me leave to depart that I may go in to my country and my land; give to me my wives and children for whom I have served thee that I may go hence. Thou knowest what service I have served thee.

Laban said to him: I have founden grace in thy sight; I know it by experience that God hath blessed me for thee; I have ordained the reward that I shall give to thee.

Then Jacob answered: Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how much thy possession was in my hands. . . . [break in the text] And when he said the contrary they brought forth all white. God hath taken the substance of your father and hath given it to me. And now God hath commanded me to depart, wherefore make you ready and let us depart hence.

Then answered Rachel and Leah: Shall we have nothing else of our father's faculty and of the heritage of his house? Shall he repute us as strangers, and he hath eaten and sold our goods? Sith God hath taken the goods of our father and hath given it to us and to our children, wherefore all that God commanded to thee, do it.

Jacob arose and set his children and his wives upon his camels, and went his way and took all his substance, and flocks, and all that he had gotten in Mesopotamia and went toward his father Isaac into the land of Canaan.

That time was Laban gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole away the idols of her father. Jacob would not let Laban know of his departing, and when he was departed with all that longed to him of right, he came to the mount of Gilead. It was told to Laban, the third day after, that Jacob was fled and gone, who anon took his brethren and pursued him by the space of seven days and overtook him in the mount of Gilead. He saw our Lord in his sleep saying to him: Beware that thou speak not angrily ne hard words to Jacob.

That time Jacob had set his tabernacle in the hill, and when he came thither with his brethren, he said to Jacob: Why hast thou done thus to me to take away my daughters as prisoners taken by sword? Why fleddest thou from me and wouldst not let me have knowledge

thereof? Thou hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and daughters, thou hast done follily. Now may I do thee harm and evil, but the God of thy father said to me yesterday: Beware that thou speak no hard words against Jacob. Thou desirest to go to the house of thy father, why hast thou them, and returned into his country.

THE RECONCILIATION WITH ESAU

Jacob went forth in his journey that he had taken. Angels of God met him, which when he saw, he said: These be the castles of God, and called that place Mahanaim. He sent messengers tofore him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, in the land of Edom, and bade them say thus to Esau: This saith thy brother Jacob: I have dwelled with Laban unto this day, I have oxen and asses, servants both men and women. I send now a legation unto my lord that I may find grace in his sight.

These messengers returned to Jacob and said: We came to Esau thy brother, and lo! he cometh for to meet thee with four hundred men.

Jacob was sore afraid then, and divided his company into twain turmes [two troops], saying: If Esau come to that one and destroy that, that other shall yet be saved. Then said Jacob: O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O Lord that saidst to me, return into thy land and place of thy nativity, and saidst I shall do well to thee, I am the least in all thy mercies, and in thy truth that thou hast granted to thy servant, with my staff I have gone this river of Jordan, and now I return with two turmes. I beseech the Lord keep me from the hands of my brother Esau, for I fear him greatly lest he come and smite down the mother with the sons. Thou hast said that thou shouldest do well to me and shouldest spread my seed like unto the gravel of the sea, and that it may not be numbered for multitude.

Then when he had slept that night, he ordained gifts for to send to his brother, goats two hundred, kids twenty, sheep two hundred, and rams twenty; forty kine and twenty bulls, twenty asses and ten foals of them. And he sent by his servants all these beasts; and bade them say that Jacob his servant sent to him this present and that he followeth after. And Jacob thought to please him with gifts.

The night following, him thought a man wrestled with him all that night till the morning, and when he saw he might not overcome him, he hurted the sinew of his thigh that he halted thereof, and said to him: Let me go and leave me, for it is in the morning. Then Jacob answered: I shall not leave thee but if thou bless me.

He said to him: What is thy name?

He answered: Jacob.

Then he said: Nay, said he, thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for if thou hast been strong against God, how much more shalt thou prevail against men?

Then Jacob said to him: What is thy name? tell me. He answered, Why demandest thou my name, which is marvellous? And he blessed him in the same place.

Jacob called the name of that same place Penuel, saying: I have seen our Lord face to face, and my soul is made safe.

And anon as he was past Penuel the sun arose. He halted on his foot, and therefore the children of Israel eat no sinews because it dried in the thigh of Jacob.

Then Jacob lifting up his eyes saw Esau coming and four hundred men with him, and divided the sons of Leah and of Rachel, and of both their handmaidens, and set each handmaid and their children tofore in the first place, Leah and her sons in the second, and Rachel and Joseph all behind. And he going tofore kneeled down to ground and, worshipping his brother, approached him. Esau ran for to meet with his brother, and embraced him, straining his neck, and weeping kissed him.

And he looked forth and saw the women and their children, and said: What been these and to whom longen they?

Jacob answered: They be children which God hath given to me thy servant and his handmaidens.

And their children approached and kneeled down, and Leah with her children also worshipped him, and last of all Joseph and Rachel worshipped him. Then said Esau: Whose been these turmes which I have met?

Jacob answered: I have sent them to thee, my lord, unto the end that I may stand in thy grace.

Esau said: I have many myself, keep these and let them be thine.

Nay, said Jacob, I pray thee to take this gift which God hath sent me that I may find grace in thy sight, for meseemeth I see thy visage like the visage of God; and therefore be thou to me merciful, and take this blessing of me.

Unnethe by compelling he taking it, said: Let us go together, I shall accompany thee and be fellow of thy journey.

Then said Jacob: Thou knowest well, my lord, that I have young children and tender, and sheep and oxen, which, if I overlaboured, should die all in a day, wherefore please it you, my lord, to go tofore, and I shall follow as I may with my children and beasts.

Esau answered: I pray thee then let my fellows abide and accompany thee, whatsoever need thou have.

Jacob said: It is no need, I need no more but one, that I may stand in thy favour, my lord.

THE RAPE OF DINAH

And Esau returned then the same way and journey that he came into Seir. And Jacob came to Succoth and builded there an house, and from thence he went in to Shalem, the town of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan, and bought there a part of a field, in which he fixed his tabernacles, of the sons of Hamor father of Shechem for an hundred lambs. And there he raised an altar, and worshipped upon it the strongest God of Israel.

It happed that Dinah, daughter of Leah, went out for to see the women of that region, which when Shechem, son of Hamor, prince of that land saw, anon loved and ravished and slept with her, oppressing her by strength, and was assotted on her in such wise as he went to his father Hamor and said: Give me this damsel in marriage that she may be my wife. Which when Jacob knew, and heard how his daughter was ravished, his sons then being absent in occupation of feeding of their beasts in the field, he held it secret till they returned. Then Hamor went to speak of this matter to Jacob, and that time his sons came from the field and heard what was happened and done, and were passing wroth and angry because he had so defouled their sister. Then said Hamor to them: Shechem my son loveth your daughter, give her to him in marriage, and let us ally each with other, let our daughters be given to you, and yours to us, and dwell ye with us. All the country is in your power, exercise and occupy it, buy and sell and take ye it. Then said Shechem to his father and brethren: Whatsoever ye ordain I will do, and what ye demand, gifts or dower, I shall gladly give it, so I may have this damsel unto my wife. Then answered the sons of Jacob to Shechem and his father in guile, dissimuling as they had not known the ravishment of their sister: We may not do that ye desire, ne give our sister to a man uncircumcised. it is a thing unlawful and great sin to

THE LORD'S BLESSING

[break in text] u Lord appeared again to Jacob after that he was returned from Mesopotamia of Syria, and was come into Bethel, and blessed him saying, "Thou shalt no more be called Jacob but Israel shall be thy name, and called him Israel, and said to him: I am God Almighty, grow and multiply, folks and peoples of nations shall come of thee, kings shall come of thy loins. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I shall give to thee and thy seed," and vanished from him.

He then raised a stone for a remembrance in the place where God spake to him, and anointed it with oil, calling the name of the place Bethel. He went thence and came in veer [spring] time unto the land that goeth to Ephrath, in which place Rachel travailed and began for cause of childing to die. The midwife said to her, Be not afeard, for thou shalt have a son.

And the death drawing near, she named him Benoni, which is as much to say as the son of my sorrow. The father called him Benjamin, that is to say the son of the right hand. There Rachel died and was buried in the way toward Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. Jacob raised a title upon her tomb; this is the title of the monument of Rachel unto this present day. Jacob went thence and came to Isaac his father into Mamre the city of Arbah, that is Hebron, in which dwelled Abraham and Isaac. And all the days of Isaac were complete, which were an hundred and fourscore years, and he consumed and died in good mind, and Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.

Thus endeth the history of Isaac and his two sons Esau and Jacob.

The [iconography of Isaac](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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