



Medieval and Renaissance Literature: Annotated Bibliography

Stephan T. Mayo

The Letters of Abelard and Heloise. Trans. By Betty Radice. London: Penguin Books, 1974.

Candid revelations of the tragic castration of theologian Abelard and the subsequent separation of the secretly married fornicators. Heloise emerges as the far more admirable, authentic and unconventional of the two. Abelard seems constitutionally incapable of recognizing, sympathizing understanding her professed suffering, her sexual frustration, her desire for a love relationship which is constant as it was before the mutilation even without the possibility of consummation, her sense of hypocrisy of entering the convent only to obey his wishes rather than any true vocation and her complaint against God for judging them so very harshly. Abelard does his best to theologize her out of these sentiments when (it would appear to me) he could move a mountain with a feather simply by commiserating with her in an honest manner, acknowledging her genuine sentiments even if he does not personally share them. His ego (albeit objectively humiliated) gets in the way of this Christian and humane act.

Armstrong, Karen. *Holy War.* The Crusades and their Impact on Today's World. NY: Anchor Books, 2001.

Brilliant analyses of the crusades from three different viewpoints: the Christian European, the Jewish and the Moslem. Applies to origin of Israel and the current Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Very insightful and depressing.

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *The Elegy of Lady Fiammetta.* Mareangela Causa-Steindler and Thomas Mauch. Ed. And Trans. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Considered one of the first psychological dramas, Boccaccio writes from the mind of Fiammetta, a married noblewoman whose lover abandons her driving her to suicidal desperation and final bitter resignation. Fiammetta is a name that appears in several of Boccaccio's works, notably *The Decameron*. He called a noblewoman who was his consort until his money ran out his "Fiametta" or little flame. This name appeared in his earliest poems. The work refers constantly to the Roman gods and very rarely to the Christian. It has been thought to exhibit Boccaccio's feminism (others consider him a misogynist). The work illustrates the joys, trials, and tribulations of courtly love. Its introspection from the point of view of someone other than the author (Augustine's introspection was autobiographical as was Petrarch's) was innovative and modern.

Brehier, Emile. *The Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Wade Baskin, trans. IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1931.

This is a sweeping survey of the big names in Medieval philosophy and theology: Alcuin, Boethius, Johannes Scotus Erugena, Peter Daman, St. Thomas Aquinas and Renaissance thinkers: Nicholas of Cusa, Pomponazzi, Campanella, Rabelais, Montaigne, Da Vinci, Pico della Mirandola, Telesio. Good review of the debate over Universals and the problem of categories designed to apply to natural things.

Cesati, France. *The Medici, Story of a European Dynasty*. Christina Caughlan and Andrea Paoletti., trans. Firenze: Mandragora, 1999.

Richly illustrated guide to major and minor De Medici's. Chock full of gossip.

Dante. *La Vita Nuova*. Trans. Barbara Reynolds. London: Penguin Books, 1964.

Sonnets of love for Beatrice Portinari, his lifelong muse, who Dante depicts as his interceder and guide in his Divine Comedy. They met at age nine, both were married to others in their teens, and Beatrice died at the age of 24, but Dante was passionately devoted to her. Work introduces his screen ladies, the death of Beatrice's father, Dante's military action, Beatrice's snub, his praise of her virtues, his inconsolability at her death and the vision that prompted him to cease writing sonnets until he could do the topic justice, i.e. probably his Comedia. Poems were circulated privately. The Didactic portions of the book designed as instructional for other poets.

Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. The Carlyle-Okey-Wickstead Trans. NY Vintage Books, 1950.

Carefully annotated edition identifying every historic and mythological allusion together with detailed explanation of Dante's astronomy, physics, cosmology and ethics and theology derived from Plato, Aristotle, Averroes, Dionysius the Aeropagite, Augustine and Aquinas.

De Pisan, Christine. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant. London: Penguin Books, 1999.

Christine de Pizan lived from c. 1364-1430 at the court of Charles V of France. She received an excellent education from her father which was further encouraged by her husband. After the death of her spouse, Christine supported her family through her writings, which were renown among the nobility through out Europe. Her works include lyrical poetry, a life of Joan of Arc and the Book of the City of Ladies. Her works survive in richly illustrated illuminated manuscripts.

Despairing over the misogynist writings of male authors like Ovid, Malleolus, Guillaume de Lorries and Jean De Meuns's Romance of the Rose, and others, Christine is visited by three spirit Ladies: "Reason, Rectitude and justice," who encourage her to refute the slander against their gender. Blaming knights for failing to do their chivalrous duty of protecting damsels against verbal assaults, they propose that Christine build a fortified city that can withstand any siege or bombardment, each stone of which will be a woman of the ancient classical or contemporary world whose life exhibited great contributions to humanity via technological invention, artistic production, fortitude, constancy, wisdom, chastity, wisdom, courage, temperance, intelligence and holiness. Part III tells how Justice brings the Queen of Heaven, the Virgin Mary, to live in the City.

A champion of women's right to respect and educational opportunity, Christine's feminism is limited by the mores of the time. Thus she willingly subjects herself to a patriarchal church, praises women who stay in abusive relationships and supports a double standard in sexual morality. This book is essential reading.

De Troyes, Chretien. *Arthurian Romances*. William Kebler and Carleton Carroll, trans. London: Penguin Books, 1991.

The most poetic and moving version of the legends. De Troyes very imaginatively takes off from the klutzy Geoffrey of Monmouth. De Troyes was a star at the illustrious court of Marie de Champagne, daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of France and then England. Eleanor's father and Marie's grandfather was the first troubadour Duke William of Aquitaine.

The Dore Illustrations for Dante's Divine Comedy. 136 Plates by Gustave Dore. NY: Dover Publications, 1976.

Producing the Inferno Plates in 1857, the Purgatorio and Paradiso plates in 1868, this most successful illustrator of the 19th century produced, in my opinion, the finest visual depictions of the epic poems. This work reproduces every plate Dore produced for the work. Viewing the plates along with the text provides for a very rich and evocative experience.

Duffy, Eamon; *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*. *New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997*.

Lushly illustrated, designed for a PBS series, the author traces every Pope from St. Peter to John Paul II in great detail. Scholarly accurate due to the Vatican's own recent tell it like it is policy and the release of documents to scholars, the work is essential background for the rise of monastic orders, cathedral schools and universities, Pope/emperor relations, Jewish/Christian/Moslem relations, The Crusades, the battle over heresy, the Popes in Avignon (the "Babylonian Captivity"), the Urbanist/Clementist Papal Schism, Florentine/Rome intrigue, the Jubilees, papal simony, the art patronage and building of the Vatican under the De Medici pope Leo X and the warrior Pope Julius II, the sack of Rome during the papacy of Clement VII by Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the war with Protestantism. A major work of towering achievement.

Durant, Will. *The Renaissance, A History of Civilization in Italy from 1304-1576*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1953.

Reading this now, I think the last generation of historians gets a bum rap when accused of Western jingoism. Durant certainly portrays the folly of Europeans and the pluralism of the eras and the interaction with earlier cultures and Eastern cultures is well brought out. Durant is my favorite historian. His narration reads like a novel. His erudition vast. He slides effortlessly from individual biography to macro-historic events. And his summaries are awe-inspiring. Is this Western triumphalism? Perhaps, but I'll re-read his just for the artistry.

Fiero, Gloria K. *The Humanistic Tradition, Book 3. The European Renaissance, The Reformation, and Global Encounter*, 4th Edition. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002.

This is one of McGraw Hill's textbooks designed for core Western Civilization courses.

It's a survey of the history, art, music, dance and literature of Western civilization and Book 3 covers the territory of my Early Modern/Renaissance course. There are multimedia aspects connected with the book; besides being lavishly illustrated the book is companioned with two audio CD's and a website for additional resources. I found this book at Georgetown University where it is being assigned. Having the bulk of my Sabbatical research behind me, I found this a very useful summary. Prof. Fiero does a masterful job of integrating women's studies and cultural diversity studies into the text, correcting the usual dead white male history of the Renaissance. This is a sourcebook to return to again and again. The chapter on the African and Native American cultures that the Europeans encountered and clashed with is rich and ripe. Selections of historical documents and choices of illustrations are fresh, distinctive and illuminating. Not the same old thing.

Geoffrey of Monmouth. *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Lewis Thorpe, Trans. London: Penguin Books, 1966.

Sir Thomas Mallory's work is the main source for the Arthurian legend. This is the earliest mention of Arthur and his court, c. 1136-37. Merlin is featured prominently here although there is no mention of Percival, Lancelot, or Tristan and Iseult. Guinevere commits adultery when Arthur's fighting Romans, but not with Lancelot. Geoffrey is chronicling the English Kings spanning 2000 years from the founding of Britain by Brutus to the coming of the Saxons. Trouble is there existed no such Brutus, no English army sacked Rome and the stuff on Merlin an Arthur was either lifted from folklore or was invented completely from Geoffrey's sprightly imagination. It's not straight fiction either since the author finds much of his material from William of Newburgh's *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* and Bede's *History of the Church in England*. Intriguing archeological finds appear to confirm parts of Geoffrey's legends. This book however purported to be fact (although filled with dialogue impossible to have been recorded and with magic) explains why authors of the Middle Ages seem to confuse fact with fiction.

Gies, Francis. *The Knight in History*. NY: Harper & Row, 1984.

Not as harsh on knighthood as Karen Armstrong but ends up telling largely the same tale; namely that the ideal and the reality rarely meshed. Good sociological description of the origins of chivalry. Superb on the Troubadours and the literature of knighthood. Case studies bring analysis to specifics by careful study of Sir William Marshal, the Kings Templar, Bertrand du Guesclin and Sir John Fastolf.

Gallagher, Joseph. *A Modern Reader's Guide to Dante's Divine Comedy*. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1996.

Canto by Canto summary of the poem identifying every allusion, mythical creature, historical personage, astrological position, chronology of the voyage, philosophical, theological and literary reference and the author's lucid and very accessible interpretations. Appendix includes outlines of other Dante poems, including *La Nuova Vita*.

Jacoff, Rachel (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*. Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1993.

Compendium of Dante Scholars. Includes a study of Dante Bibliographies, the poet's literary forebears, an analysis of the *Vita Nuova*, his political involvements a prior of Florence as exile and as advocate for the Holy Roman Emperor, his Thomistic theology,

his poetic style and great useful parts of La Commedia: Inferno, Purgatorial and Paradiso. Necessary for structure and identification of historical personages. Wonderful insights on the work.

Jardine, Lisa. *Worldly Goods. A New History of the Renaissance*. NY: W.W.Norton & Company, 1996.

A tour de force, every page a revelation. Lisa Jardin demonstrates the Marxian principle that economics is the one invariable in history. She makes a great case that the Renaissance was based on a commercial miracle. Chapters on trade, banking, commodities, craft guilds, the employment of humanists and artists by prelates, mercenary rulers and banker princes paint the perfect economic compliment to the history of Renaissance art, architecture and politics. The chapter on the book as commodity, both pre and post printing press is worth the price of the book alone. The next to final chapter links astronomy, cartography, geography, navigation and the discovery of the New World. And the final chapter finishes with the conspicuous consumption of the National Monarchs at the close of the 16th and early 17th century.

Johnson, Paul. *The Renaissance, A Short History*. NY: The Modern Library, 2000.

Familiar stuff after reading Will Durant and Burckhardt, but nicely compact and useful for enhancing the memory. The Author, like all in this series, is an acknowledged expert. Most useful chapter on the technological inventions in the Middle Ages that led to Gothic economic prosperity as a basis for the renaissance or early modern period.

Keegan, John. *The Face of Battle*. NY: Penguin Books, 1996.

The renowned war historian attempts to retrieve the experience of men in various forms of battle through careful documentary reconstruction, forensic evidence and analogies with contemporary traumatic situations. He concentrates on three battles: Agincourt 1415, Waterloo 1815, and the Somme 1916. I was especially interested in the battle of Agincourt where the English King Henry V defeated a much larger French army of the mad King Charles VI. Crystal clear descriptions of battle preparations, the physical and mental conditions of the opposing armies, the strategies, the use of the long bows against French men-of-arms, the muddy field. Very interesting section on what it's like to face an arrow barrage, to march in full armor over a muddy plowed field, to sewing a battle ax when your forward advance is blocked by the bodies of your own comrades. Keegan shows that the use of the longbow and archers was overrated as the cause of victory. The French advance through the cordon of trees engaged too many men-at-arms who bunched together and could not swing their weapons. As a ridge of bodies mounted the archers clubbed and stabbed the French knights to death. Keegan describes Henry's unchivalrous decision to execute all the French prisoners before facing the third column of French men at arms. This entailed a huge loss of ransom booty, a principal motivator for Medieval warfare, and Henry eventually halted the massacre when he found his army out of danger. Henry was typically merciless in pursuing the routed French army and allowed his men rapine pillaging in the intervening French towns on the way to English held Calais.

King, Ross. *Brunelleschi's Dome*. NY: Penguin Books, 2000.

The life and times of the designer of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, "an impossible feat." Details Renaissance science and aesthetics.

Le Goff, Jacques. *Medieval Civilization 400-1500*. Julia Barrow, trans. NY: Barnes & Noble, 1964.

A necessary corrective to past histories. Probably loses a lot in translation (Cervantes said that reading a translation is like looking at a tapestry from the back). It's not as eloquent as Tuchman, but it shares the same contemporary historiography. Corrects the exaggerations of the chroniclers with new demographic and archeological data. Excellent historical section followed by analyses of Medieval Culture, Society, Attitudes, mentalities and Sensibilities. Fresh insights in every paragraph.

Lewis, R.W.B. *Dante, A Penguin Life*. NY: Penguin, 2001.

Concise, lucid text concentrating on peak moments in Dante's life, his encounter with Beatrice, La Vita Nuova, Politics in Florence, his exile, the writing of the Comedy, his last days in Ravenna.

Maimonides, Moses. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. M. Friedlander, trans. 2nd Ed. NY: Dover, 1956.

Does for the Old Testament what Aquinas did for the New Testament, reconciles it with Aristotle's science, ethics and cosmology. Originally written in Arabic. Moses Maimonides was born on March 30, 1135, d. 1204.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *Clizia*. Trans. Daniel T. Gallagher. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1996.

A comedy with a moral message. The Machiavellian hero is the old wife who conquers the family and gets what she wants — bourgeois respectability by deception. Clizia is a beautiful 17-year-old girl raised in her household. Both her husband and her son lust after her and are planning to fornicate with the girl. Nicomaco (sic), the old father plans to marry her to his servant who has agreed for pay to give the old geezer his half of the marital bed. Sofronia (the wise old wife) seeks to marry Clizia with another smelly farm servant. Nicomaco gets his way, but when he climbs into bed thinking that the person next to him is Clizia, he actually is lying next to Siro, another male servant who Sofronia has connived to substitute for Clizia. When he is caught with Siro, he is humiliated and tamed. Once Clizia's wealthy father appears, Sofronia agrees to marry Clizia with her son Cleandro in a conventional marriage. Lesson: All's well that end's well as long as you're crafty and bold enough to bring it about.

Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. NY: Modern Library, 1940.

A kind of audition after being ousted from his job as secretary to Soderini, the Republican leader of Florence and having been tortured as a traitor, Machiavelli tried to ingratiate himself with the restored De Medici with this advice book. The foxy lion in Machiavelli was proposing a Rome-Florence hegemony over Italy in line with the Fortuna of the ascendancy to the papacy of a De Medici Pope (Leo X). The opportunistic advice is notorious and I'm memorizing it to understand what contemporary American politics is all about.

Mallory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte D'Arthur*. NY: Modern Library, 1994.

One thousand pages of jousting, warcraft, so-called Chivalry, rape (King Arthur resulting)

and adultery (Tristan and Iseult, Lancelot and Guinevere.). Here is all in all its dreary repetitiveness and a good case for what was mortally wrong with medieval society. Yah, yah. I know: Camelot, the King for all seasons, Christianity uber alles, bravery, championship of endangered damsels, good against evil (Merlin against Morgan Le Fay) knights in shining armor riding up on horseback to save the day. But underneath it all was a macho brutality tempered superficially by allegiance to chivalry and feudalism. There's not a word about razing peasant villages to prevent enemy armies from resupplying themselves, or of wenching privileges, or of the practice of hostage taking for ransom, or of the pillaging activities of knights between wars, or of the tax monies squandered on tournaments. Still no (or few) modern readers would find the life portrayed at Arthur's Court in this work as romantic or worthy of emulation. It takes Richard Gere and Hollywood to accomplish that task.

Apparently John Steinbeck got a different impression: "I think my sense of right and wrong, my feeling of noblesse oblige, and any thought I may have against the oppressor, and for the oppressed came from *Le Morte D'Arthur*."

Manchester. *A World Lit Only by Fire. The Medieval Mind and the Renaissance. Portrait of an Age*. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1992.

Author of *The Last Lion*: Winston Spencer Churchill, *The Arms of Krupp* and *The Death of a President*, Manchester set out to write a book about Magellan and ended by placing the global circumnavigator in the context of six centuries from Constantine to Elizabeth I. The book is well illustrated and chock full of interesting and tantalizing points of fact. There is quite a bit of dramatic bombast, which leads the author to perpetuate myths, exaggerations and distortions of the past chroniclers; some of who had a political ax to grind. The stuff on the Borgia Pope Alexander VI, his daughter Lucrezia and his son Cesare Borgia, who is featured so prominently in Machiavelli's *The Prince* is suitable for super market tabloids. Manchester never qualifies or questions his sources, not to say there is no truth to his narrative. At least the book avoids the Victorian euphemisms which are maddening. The candor is welcome although an indication of contemporary mores (a throw back to classical bluntness, recaptured in the early modern period). The book is over general, but it provides an elementary overview and impressionistic introduction to vast historical periods.

McEvedy, Colin. *The Penguin Atlas of Ancient History*. London: Penguin Books, 1967. *The New Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*. London: Penguin Books, 1992. *The Penguin Atlas of Modern History*. (to 1815) London: Penguin Books, 1972.

With these three books one can, through a series of overlays, trace the permutations of regional boundaries, dynastic incursions, conquests and defeats, national unifications, the creation and destructions of states, trade routes, the course of plague, the outlines of the spread of various world religions, and population successions. These maps and their commentaries were essential in breaking free of a Eurocentric perspective and substituting for it a more global perspective. Consider a typical passage explaining concurrent events to the famous battle of Poitiers (11356) with the English defeating the French: "In the Maghreb, the Hafsid state split into three principalities: Constantine, Bougie and Tunis. In Spain, the kingdom of Aragon absorbed the sub-kingdom of Majorca (1354). In Scandinavia, the Danish King Valdemar Atterdag recovered the provinces pawned to Sweden and conquered the island of Gotland (1360-61). In Russia, Pskov won its independence from Novgorod (1348), and Lithuania occupied all of the Principality of Byransk bar Tarus (1357) and began to contest the steppe lands with the Golden Horde." P. 92. *Atlas of Medieval History*.

Plato. *Timaeus*. Francis Cornford, trans. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. 1959.

The best-known text of Plato's before the 14th Century. Plato's influential cosmology. The one dialogue known to Dante.

Pico Della Mirandola. *On the Dignity of Man*. Trans. Charles Glenn Wallis. NY: Macmillan Library of Liberal Arts, 1985.

One of the handsome, young stars of Platonic Academy founded by Cosimo de Medici in Florence. Pico prepared this treatise as an introduction to his scheduled debate on any topic or question on any subject posed to him by the best minds in Rome. Pico was a polymath who mastered Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Arabic and attempted to reconcile Christianity, Islam and Judaism with Christianity the governing theology. His treatise is a refutation of the Augustinian thesis that due to original sin, man's soul is corrupt, self-infatuated and devoted to sinning for sinning's sake.

Pico also is rejecting the Thomistic notion that as a rational animal, man's position in the providentially governed hierarchically structured cosmos is above the most perfected animal and below the least perfected angel in the great chain of being.

Pico claims, on the contrary, that man's god-given freedom of the will means he has no pre-ordained place in the cosmos and through the choices she makes, can adopt the nature of a snake or a slug or rise higher than the cherubim and seraphim of angels to become one with the God-head Himself. Thus, as opposed to Augustine, human free will constitutes a special place of honor and dignity in the cosmos since man is unique among creatures and capable of a perfection beyond that of any created spirit. Making human freedom (autonomy) and self-determination the basis of human dignity marks Pico as a proto-modern thinker since that concept became the basis of universal human and political rights and democratic egalitarianism in the 17th and 18th centuries.

Procacci, Guiliano. *History of the Italian People*. Anthony Paul, trans. London: Penguin Books, 1968.

Outstanding brief history of Italy, essential for detailed chronicling of Florence, Rome, Venice, Milan and Naples through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Seward, Desmond. *Henry V, the Scourge of God*. NY: Penguin Books, 1987.

A necessary corrective to the gushing British historians of Shakespeare's Hero-King Henry V. Henry emerges as a pious bigot who persecuted the Lollards in England. Convinced of his divinely ordained destiny, he crushed the French at Agincourt, then conquered Normandy by ruthless siege tactics employing tunneling, canon fire, the wasting of the surrounding territory and starvation of the populations. Very useful on medieval siege tactics. Henry's terms of settlement were gruesome and punitive. Although he attempted to discipline his knights and archers, they terrorized and plundered the French bourgeoisie and peasant classes. Henry played off the Burgundians and Almanacs who failed to unite against him, whereby he marched into Paris to "claim his right" to the French Kingship. His skills at diplomacy were so good that he convinced the French queen to disinherit her own son, the Dauphin and future Charles VII from the succession, naming Henry is his stead. Lancastrian France was hardly a period of peace and efficient administration. The French loved the mad King Charles VI, despite his infirmity, weakness and incompetence. Henry's rule was harsh, exploitative, and disruptive to French agriculture and commerce. His starvation of the French population was calculated and his rule was seen largely as a ploy for English plunder of France.

Henry's father (Henry IV, Duke of Lancaster) usurped the English crown from the Valois king Richard II. Yet Henry, whose English title was clouded, claimed that the Dauphin had no legal rights against him as heir to the French throne. The vision of an English occupation of France in a Great Britain was chimerical. The legendary Jeanne d'Arc's success against the English was driven by French nationalism which overcame provincial rivalries and by the hatred of the English engendered by their arrogance, avarice, brutality and tyranny.

Henry V, pious hero of Shakespeare's play shed as much French blood as the Nazis and the French have not quite gotten over it to this day.

Tuchman, Barbara. *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. NY: Ballantine Books, 1978.

The sweeping saga of a sad century in Europe chronicling the plague, the papal schism, the 100 years war between England and France, the companies, the Peasant Revolts, a mad king, ruthless feuds and brigandage, dynastic ambitions and militant knighthood. A distant mirror indeed.

Viroli, Maurenzo. *Niccolo's Smile, A Biography of Machiavelli*. Trans. Antony Shugaar. NY: Hill and Wang, 2000.

Recent biography of the Florentine fox. Author tries to defeat notion of Machiavelli as amoral. Textual analysis reveals him to be a partisan of republicanism and a Florentine patriot. The rulers (whether princely or republican must violate private morality for the sake of keeping power in the hands of Florentines and not in the hands of Frenchmen, Holy Roman Emperors or rival City States.

Young, Colonel G.F. *The Medici*. NY: The Modern Library, 1933.

If a bit sycophantic, this compendious work traces with infinite detail the career of the great banker family, the de Medici in Florence. Cosimo, Piero, Lorenzo the Magnificent, Giovanni (Pope Leo X), Guilio (Pope Clement VII) and Catherine de Medici, queen of France. Great diplomats, negotiators, patrons of the arts and church leaders the Medici also had their share of madness, incompetence, bigotry, ruthlessness, sensuality, avarice, all the contradiction that mark the period we foolishly have been taught was a "renaissance."

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