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University of Tolima
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Cesar Velandia Silva
Universidad de Ibagué
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Eduardo Peñaloza Kairuz
Universidad de Ibagué
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Deepening in the Magdalena river influence with historical growth of Honda (Colombia). An atypical case of urban morphology study in Latin America

Juan José Ospina-Tascón¹*, César Augusto Velandia Silva² and Eduardo Peñaloza Kairuz²

Abstract: The municipality of Honda (Tolima—Colombia) is located at the convergence of the rivers Magdalena, Gualí River and Quebradaseca. Its geographical location constitutes a key structuring node for regional development in the Colombian historical context. Since its origins, prehispanic Honda has been configured in an atypical way to the other Latin American cities then traced over with the imprint of the Spanish checkerboard. The goal of the study is to recognize the relevance of the Magdalena River, its tributaries and the geomorphological conditions of the place as relevant elements in its urban transformation closely related to the environment. Primary sources as historical archive, literature and planimetry referring to settlement and colonization processes are investigated, which is then contrasted with current cartography and satellite images that provide new graphic and theoretical material. City of Honda heritage, declared as an asset of national interest by culture law for its preservation, still requires to building its history about city implications with the nature-culture linkages of land-water landscape.

Subjects: Urban Studies; Urban History; Human Geography; Planning - Human Geography; Urban Geography

Keywords: Honda; Magdalena River; historic center; urban conservation

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Juan José Ospina-Tascón is currently a professor at the University of Tolima in the Architecture program and is part of the E-ArC research group. He is a Doctor in Architecture Project. University of La Salle - Barcelona (Spain). His research focuses on urban studies where he analyses the territory from a historical perspective based on the particularities of the landscape and the presence of water in each case study. He has published his research results in Spain, Cuba and England. He has also been a speaker at international conferences held in Spain, Mexico and Uruguay. Email: jospina@ut.edu.co

César Augusto Velandia Silva. Doctor in Geography. University of Ibagué. cesar.velandia@unibague.edu.co

Eduardo Peñaloza Kairuz. Magister in Structures and new technologies for building. eduardo.penaloza@unibague.edu.co

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The proposed methodology for research development focuses on the graphic reconstruction of each of the moments that have occurred in Honda from its initial formation to the present. With the purpose of identifying the role that the Magdalena River has had in this place, in addition to the repercussion in the commerce and the history of Colombia. This process is developed through the urban redrawing of Honda during each of the important moments in urban growth (using CAD software) and comparing historical and current urban planimetry, aerial photographs, satellite images and a reinterpretation of the site during various field visits.

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1. Introduction. Water and city

Historically, water is a geographical element that conditions spatial organization, growth and productive activity of cities (Kostof, 2005; Whitehead, Smith, & Wade, 2011). In this sense, a universal constant in the development of civilizations has been the permanent linkage with a main river, understood as a natural element that makes life possible and contributes to optimize both economic and urban, cultural, social and of course the hydrographic biodiverse environment.

Rivers are elements of great scenic interest, for that reason “to clean up and invest in the bodies of water and their environments gives value to the cities, increases the quality of life and provides healthy environments” (Camacho, 2014). Such is the link established between the river and the city, which turns out to be a witness to its urban history. The river stands out as an element of the landscape that contributes to generate identity and attachment to those who live near it (Duffo, 2013).

In Colombia, once called “Grande de la Magdalena” River has a length of 1500 km. It has been constituted as the main watery axis navigable from Honda (Tolima region) to its river mouth in Bocas de Ceniza (Atlantico region) in the Caribbean Sea. From the beginning of the Spanish conquest in 1536 the Magdalena River has been up to the present a natural element forging dynamics that have contributed to enhance international-regional development.

For its part, man as a social being, interacts with his equals in the natural environment and transforms it to inhabit it, dominate it and exploit its resources. Since ancient times it has been shown that great civilizations such as the Greek and Sumerian established their cities in front of fluvial edges as military, commercial, exchange strategy and also communication with other communities or as supply sites.

This reflection leads us to study the importance of the Honda site and its landscape -that the Magdalena river runs through- lies in a strategical and geographical position where several land routes coincide with the fluvial axis, which allowed the exploitation and exchange of products, the formation of the initial settlement and the consolidation of the municipality as a relevant node in the network of exchanges since the colonial period. This because towards east of the port was the high plateau and the largest population of the country, and towards the west were the mining provinces of Cauca and Antioquia. All these were important destinations for the goods that arrived from Spain.

That is why the city of Honda becomes the main port in the interior of the country, since from there were distributed products imported from Spain and those that exported mineral and vegetable products from the interior of the country and the north of Tolima region.

This study is carried out with the purpose of providing graphic material that complements the historical literature of Honda, since after research on literary sources and into documentary archives, findings anecdotally describe its ports, buildings and characters that intervened during its transformation and urban consolidation, but there is no accurate drawing maps that complements the theory.

The proposed methodology for research development focuses on the graphic reconstruction of each of the moments that have occurred in Honda from its initial formation to the present. With the purpose of identifying the role that the Magdalena River has had in this place, in addition to the repercussion in the commerce and the history of Colombia. This process is developed through the urban redrawing of Honda during each of the important moments in urban growth (using CAD...
software) and comparing historical and current urban planimetry, aerial photographs, satellite images and a reinterpretation of the site during various field visits.

2. The role of the Magdalena River and its tributaries in the urban-historical context of Honda

The municipality of Honda is located in the northern area of the Tolima region (Colombia). Landscape is configured from a steep place where the foothills of the Eastern and Central Andean Cordilleras converge. This geographically constituted like a “peninsula”, because it is surrounded by rivers on its three sides. The main one is the Magdalena, which forms a pronounced curve where the Guali and Quebradaseca rivers converge. This geographical scenario, which has unique topographic characteristics, welcomed the first inhabitants of a territory where a particular urban transformation took place during its first settlement. Later designated as a Villa and then as a key city of the New Granada Kingdom.

In Colombia, the Magdalena River constitutes a structural reference of the cultural manifestations of the cities founded on its shores (Honda, Ambalema and Mariquita, in the case of the Tolima region), and it also means a symbiotic and deep intangible and mythic relationship with its inhabitants at the river banks, as a result of adaptation to the environment.

The geography of the city is inseparable from its history and without both we cannot understand its architecture and the concrete imprint of that “human thing” (Rossi, 2015). The rugged topography of landscape where Honda is located has had a significant impact on the current urban configuration. This can be deduced by analysing its spontaneous emergence without foundational act and urban growth that had to adapt to existing steep topography between the basins of the Guali and the Quebradaseca Rivers in contrast to the plain that constitutes the near territory of Mariquita.

The proximity of Honda to the Magdalena River and its strategic location in the centre of the country contributed to became an economic enclave for Colombia. Due to a vertical terrain cut about 30 meters above the water level placed on the western bank of the Magdalena River, it has
been possible from the city to have visual domain to control the east to west accessibility by land through ancient bridges. That also has allowed only navigation through the river and goods exchange from north to south fluvially.

There are two important water axes that have conditioned the urban morphology of Honda: first, the Quebradaseca River. And second, the Guali River, which originates in the paramo of Herveo in the Central Cordillera of Colombia whose channel is covered with abundant stones, it is narrow and fast with running flows into the Magdalena.

As explained by Guzmán (2002), the history of Honda has developed simultaneously with the uses that man has given the Magdalena River “from the spontaneous conformation as a pier station until it became the most important river port for the Andean provinces over four centuries, lasting until navigation was replaced by other modes of land transportation.”

The Magdalena River was the main route for navigation in the New Granada Kingdom and therefore, the structuring axis of the exchange and communications in the New Kingdom through the use of canoes of indigenous origin. However, the Spanish Crown repeatedly banned this system in the face of the notable decrease in this population caused by this hard work. From 1590 African slave labour was introduced to replace the Indians.

The navigable section of Magdalena River from Honda to Mompox linked the centre and north of the country with other regions. Honda was the node where converged the New Kingdom main roads. This made possible the operation of cities supplying and flow of production from silver and gold mines exploitation, generating processes of new settlements and land uses transformation.

The origin of the Honda Villa besides Guali River is related with San Francisco Bridge. Built in the second half of the 18th century the bridge connected both sectors of the Villa and facilitated the distribution of merchandise between port until the cities of Mariquita, Ibagué and beyond with the west of the Kingdom.

During this century, the urban history of Honda was impregnated with great damage to the bridges. Due to the floods of the Guali River (1710, 1744, 1750, 1757, 1762, 1771) it revealed the existence of workshops and skilled trades as carpenters, masons and blacksmiths in the Villa. The Guali and the Quebradaseca Rivers although smaller in length and flow, were also fundamental elements in the urban configuration of Honda. In its convergence the geomorphology of the place is unique, because there is a continuous falling of stony pebbles that turn its waters into torrentious courses. This node is currently called the Honda Fall.
2.1. The role of water and topography in the atypical urban configuration of Honda

Since the conquest of America in the late fifteenth century, numerous cities founded by the Spaniards were developed by the implementation of checkerboard design. This is a common spatial design of a reticular urban layout of blocks and streets in which the typical morphological model of European cities under the Christian domain was replicated (Morris, 2011). This pattern was developed around a plaza where government, ecclesiastical, civil and economic buildings are located. It is a typical setup of existing and numerous historic centres in Latin American cities, such as Tunja, Popayán, Lima and Quito.

Guzmán (2002) explains in addition that orthogonal layout guaranteed order and control in the new cities, enabling to protect them from an unknown and hostile environment. The chessboard was proposed in antiquity by the Roman Empire as a defensive and control strategy, but also as a design element that would contribute to the territorial organization of the new cities and its linkage of the different land uses, exalting also the perspective and the monumental scale.

The Magdalena River as the main navigable axis to inland south America have characteristics related to its flow and length that guarantees soil fertility along the rugged central mountain range. The river was a key reference in the decision making by conquerors regarding the selection new foundations settlement. (Zambrano & Bernard, 1993). However, developing the checkerboard model in the irregular terrain where Honda is now located was complicated.

Researching about first conformation of Honda settlement, there is as port preexistence discovered in 1539 by three renowned Spanish expeditionaries: Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, Sebastián de Belalcázar and Nicolás de Federmann. In their path along the Magdalena they discovered right at the convergence with the Gualí River a numerous huts village inhabited by Ondamas. The Tolima region was inhabited with a lot of very fierce indigenous gropings who usually are associated by historians to the Panches or Tolimas people, a greater group that acquire
its name as the Pijaos. That means that bigger groups like Pijaos or Panches in fact were set up as a federation of groupings only to fight against the Spanish invader.

The occupation of the New Granada Kingdom, as indicated by Colmenares (1972), is based on geographical accidents as natural elements that allow the constitution of new territorial borders. The conquest of the territory is also due to the needing of empty spaces for control, not yet incorporated into the Spanish domain, through the process of settlement (Guzmán, 2002). As was common in the Colombian territory, the location of settlements was determined also by natural resources discoverings. Findings of precious metals also gave rise to another different form of occupation of the territory. In this sense, with the extraction of gold from the rivers mining districts were formed, giving rise to entities known each as “Real de Minas” (Mecham, 1927).

The spontaneous origin of the new settlement resulted in an atypical urban formation. In this case, the configuration lacked of a central place composed of the main square and framed by architecture represented by common elements of the orthogonal model as church, convents and a town hall. The topography and the geographical features (creeks, rivers, falls, rock walls, etc.) constituted natural barriers that resulted in narrow streets to the contour lines, similar to the medieval cities. The link to the river in a steep territory also served as a military strategy in terms of the protection of the property during conquest times and gave rise to the formation of sinuous streets and slopes that are still evident, being Calle de las Trampas the most recognized in Honda.

At the end of the sixteenth century the settlement process of the region continued to developing precariously due to a strong indigenous resistance. The urban population did not increase significantly. There is even a relative depopulation. Despite colonial society settled down and began to model an inner space dependent on each cities design, develop becomes not only as an agglomerated settlement but also related to the agrarian economy and large properties exploitation (Guzmán, 2002).

The route along the Magdalena River began to consolidate for the exchange between the highlands of the Andes Cordilleras and the rest of the regions. In addition, with the beginning of mining exploitation of the Mariquita region besides operation of Reales de Minas, Honda became the landing port of the region. After this, Honda was given to Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada as land of “Encomienda” (Mecham, 1927) by the Spanish Kingdom, due to existing connectivity with San Sebastián de Mariquita and its proximity to the river.

In 1560, connections of the initial settlement continued being related to Magdalena River. In this period, it became a parish of whites when founding process takes place, although there is no document that evidences it. Honda obtained the title of “Villa de San Bartolomé de Honda”. Certified by Crown Royal Decree on 4 March 1643 (Ocampo, 1984).

In this period, the Hospice of San Francisco (current market place) and the residence of the Company of Jesus (Florez de Ocariz, 1674) were built, Despite its urban scale, the role of Honda in the country economic growth was important, since it was consolidated as a national landmark and was the most important Villa of the Viceroyalty, considered also as the internal port of Cartagena de Indias, due to a straight relationship with the Magdalena River and the royal roads.

In the Republican period (1835–1853), Honda was a supply centre for international exchange with England mainly. As a port, it was a mandatory stopover. The opening of steam ships navigation through Magdalena River contributed to silver, tobacco, coffee, cinchona, indigo and other products for exchange and trade. During civil war, Honda held its importance as strategic and military city.
Becoming the key communications spot, during the Colony it was called the “Viceroyalty Throat”. At this time it was necessary to build bridges that gave continuity to the terrestrial paths called “Royal Roads”, which communicated the rest of the country.

The city of Honda was consolidated in the seventeenth century as main centre of exchange due to its connectivity with Santafe, Ibague, Cartago, Popayan and Quito. So its commercial vocation led to the construction of new specialized equipment such as warehouses, shops and lodgings, for which it was necessary to adapt the land and protect it from the floods *(Archivo General de la Nación, 1741)*.

The Villa growth dynamics and its urban space were strongly related to commercial uses. Houses, often two stories built, had their respective stores. Certain streets specialized for trade such as Calle Real, Calle del Comercio, the Convent of San Francisco square and Alto del Rosario.

The mestizo (half-blood) population represents a considerable part of the whole. However, the Spanish born population was the one having most economic and political power. It has also been noted to consolidate as a Villa was necessary the appointment of a lot of improvements for an established town hall, administrative headquarters (mayor’s office actual location), the consistorial house in addition to gallows, public pillory and jail.

During the seventeenth century the Augustinian Order was located outside the city walls. At the same time, the Santo Domingo Order was established. These religious elements were reinforced by the presence of the Church of Alto del Rosario and Del Carmen Parish. By 1620, the Company of Jesus established in the port. From 1625, they achieved ecclesiastical recognition when assigned them a Parish.

About 1610, after Pijaos defeat, ethnic miscegenation continued and dispersed settlements arose, caused various units of agricultural and mining production subcentres. This first expansion, as slow growth settlements set out as a non-reticular layout.

In contrast, the multiple terrain differences of Honda, served as a military strategy for protection of the city during conquest times. It gave rise to the formation of winding streets, being Calle de...
las Trampas the most recognized. Slopes were place of surveillance before possible sieges. In this sense, analysing the urban growth of Honda allows us to understand its continuous process of formal adaptation to the territory, where the Magdalena River shaped and generated guidelines for the unique urban morphology.

2.2. Hygiene in the villa of Honda

Urban hygiene movement begins in Latin America in the eighteenth century with the influence of the Age of Lights. Enlightenment ideas and hygienism becomes important in the colonies. It had to deal with interest of spatial study of the sanitary problem, producing a remarkable increase of medical topographies as a methodology used to detect the potentially unhealthy foci in urban areas and deal with any available resources for decrease citizen morbidity.

The concepts of a clean and decent urban society and residual management of the contemporary city were already used by Haussmann in Paris and Edwin Chadwick in London (Ospina-Tascón, 2014; Urteaga, 1980). The Spanish Crown considered that wealth of its nations was based on the population abundance. Therefore causes of depopulation will be a wide government concern. Urban improvements and medicine allowed advances accompanied by the notion of hygiene: food, good air, cleanliness.

A new conception of a city was born. Sewers until that moment were open then covered in a first system. Places to garbage disposal were assigned and wide and clean streets in which air circulates were designed. Until this time the dead were buried in the churches or at best, in an immediate lot. Carlos IV took care of this problem by Real Warrant of March 27, 1789 ordering cemeteries construction in the periphery of cities. These were made through the Viceroy’s guidelines (Guzmán, 2002).
2.3. **Conformation of neighbourhoods and land use in Honda. XVIII—XX centuries**

In 1778, the establishment of tobacco administration house in Honda increased commercialization of tobacco and interchange with high Magdalena and Caribbean coastal cities. Port of Honda became the main distributor of commerce products in the country. This activity led to the consolidation of the city and the zoning of land uses. Residential use had three neighbourhoods since that time: Holy Church, El Retiro and Alto del Rosario.

The nineteenth century defined land for religious and educational equipment. The College of the Company of Jesus and the Convents of San Francisco Order, La Popa and Dominicans. These elements were expanded and even moved. That was the case of the College of the Company of Jesus, located one block from town centre and bought by the Honda Town Council in 1769. Two years later it began to function as a hospital and as a cemetery in its adjoining land (*Archivo General de la Nación, s.f.*). The school could only be moved to a new building until 1765, two years before the expulsion of the Jesuits.

The first 5 years of the nineteenth century showed symptoms of a relative stagnation of the port. New routes and ports were in service. The importance of Honda had diminished. Products were distributed from other routes. The fatal strike was the 1805 earthquake, which devastated much of its urban space. This low period lasted until the middle of the 19th century, when the stabilization of navigation along the Magdalena River prompted a new boom of the port.

The 1805 earthquake demolished almost all of city buildings. Added the opening of new commercial routes and the independence war; the city is not only ruined but loses its commercial importance. After the catastrophe, the city began a slow recovery process until the second half of the 19th century with the introduction of steam navigation by Magdalena River in 1847 and later in 1883 with the construction of the national railway that joined two peripheral ports: Caracoli Port.
and Arrancaplumas Port. Honda takes off from its decadence, becoming again the main axis of the economy and commerce of the country.

However the Villa of San Bartolomé de Honda consolidated its importance as a military port during the periods of Independence (1810) and Gran Colombia (1819–1830). As Guzman (2002) explains, it was a strategic position between the patriotic and royalist armies, which from the beginning struggled for their possession. It can be said that whoever occupied this square was taking control of the capital. Honda was the Independence headquarters, formed one of the battalions that fought in the Lower Magdalena in 1812. In Honda armies were supplied with food and boats, which conditioned for war, forming with them fleets of combat. In 1815 the Villa became a City, four years later the independence process was assured until 1819, and the economy was boosted by port use of the Magdalena River in the sites called Los Altos and Los Bajos.

In 1889 the two margins of the Magdalena River were united by the construction of an iron bridge by Bernardo Navarro, producing an appreciable importance for the city commercial activity. Years later in 1917, the main Market was built. Now declared a National Monument, as the Navarro Bridge and the whole historic center and its area of influence.

During each historical period the rise of Honda is related to the port activity. It culminated with the incorporation of the railroad in Colombia. Since navigation ended, Honda began to lose relevance with other cities that were growing and gaining national representation. This aspect

Figure 7. Actual urban morphology of Honda and its vinculation with Magdalena River, the geomorphology and the railroad.

Note: Authors from theoretical research and planimetical archives, compared with CAD planimetry.
was surely a trigger in the evolution of the urban form after the appearance of new land uses, since it is evident that the initial city that used to radiate with respect to the river is now known as the historic center and that is where the traditional colonial architecture of Honda is still maintained.

Such is the degree of conservation of streets and buildings in the historic centre that in 2010 Honda is declared as a Heritage Village of Colombia. Some buildings were declared national heritage assets. The Cathedral of Our Lady of Rosario, Calle de las Trampas, Navarro bridge (declared in 1994), the House of former President Alfonso Lopez and the Market (declared in 1997 Parthenon of Tolima). At present, the city is baptized as the “Cartagena of the interior”, “City of the bridges”, “City of peace” and “City of friendly people”.

Honda and its close linkage to the Magdalena River nature continue to be recognized for its role in Colombia’s growth and development. Nowadays it is a city where its architecture and language of colonial architecture stand out as a testimony of its past that is evident in the facades of manor houses of Andalusian and Castilian style reflecting the cultural influence of its colonizers and those who have inhabited it until the present. As mentioned above, Honda is recognized as the “City of bridges”. However, of the 40 built 22 have disappeared and only 18 remain, counting those located on the rivers and streams that are part of the urban sector and rural of the municipality.

However, it is considered necessary to continue preserving the municipality’s heritage and its real estate assets and to implementing strategies that lead to the preservation of Honda’s Historic Centre as a collective, sustainable and competitive asset, as proposed in the current Special Management and Protection Plan, (PEMP) of Honda (Ministry of Culture, 2017).

3. Conclusions
The Municipality of Honda continues to be a significant reference in the national history. It constitutes for the people of Tolima region as a remarkable cultural heritage. Honda participated in the Independence of Colombia and in the formative process of the nation.

The geomorphology of place where the municipality of Honda is located has had a significant impact on the current urban configuration. This can be deduced by analysing its spontaneous emergence without foundational act and urban growth that had to adapt to the steep topography that exists between the basins of the Gualí and the Quebradaseca Rivers in contrast to the plain that constitutes the Mariquita territory.

This highlights the strategic position where Honda is located, its related influence to crossroads and Magdalena River, the main navigation path. The “Villa de San Bartolomé de Honda”, as it was named in the stately language of that time, was the most important of the Viceroyalty and was titled Port of Honda to be erected in such quality.

The Port came to be the bridge to go from the New Kingdom to Spain and vice versa and also to Quito and Lima in those first years when people from Santa Marta and Coro believed that this fabulous kingdom was here and you could go to it.

Honda, for its history is considered an expression of Hispanic from the time when Spain founded cities conquered and colonized the New World. Its urban and economic growth was the result of the direct link with the Magdalena River. By Honda passed through the major scale commerce of raw materials, left all silver and gold of the Reales de Minas of the Kingdom. There, the Von Humboldt and Mutis Botanical Expedition had a base, there civil wars passed, soldiers left there their trail of heroism, and apart from the Gran Colombia and throughout the 19th century almost all the great men who came to the country, passed by Honda and had to leave something and something they took.
In order to preserve the heritage value of the municipality, it is necessary to implement urban strategies that contribute to linking the city back to the river nature, public spaces that link the natural environment and spatially articulate the neighbouring buildings, of which a large number, their age, materiality and architectural style, they are classified as assets of cultural interest in accordance with the Culture Law, and obligation of conservation embodied in the current Basic Land Management Plan (PBOT) of the municipality.

Since preservation of heritage contributes to the appropriation and recognition of their transcendence through time, in this sense, it is considered necessary to develop strategies that contribute to linking the city to the Magdalena River, as well as the implementation of urban renewal proposals in the water round with the purpose of highlighting its high landscape potential.

As a new configurator of the urban form, the role played by the railway line is recognized. In this way it is also important to advance innovative interventions in the public space as an articulator of the built-up mass, in addition to contributing to the protection, recovery, conservation, revitalization of its patrimonial, environmental, urban, architectural, symbolic and immaterial values with the purpose of preserving the Historic Center of Honda as a collective, sustainable and competitive cultural heritage.

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Author details
Juan José Ospina-Tascón 1
E-mail: jospina@ut.edu.co
César Augusto Velandia Silva 2
E-mail: cesar.velandia@unibague.edu.co
Eduardo Peñaloza Kairuz 3
E-mail: eduardo.penaloza@unibague.edu.co
1 Universidad de Ibagué, Ibagué, Colombia.
2 Universidad de Ibagué, Ibagué, Colombia.

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Notes
2. Camacho 2014??.
3. Duffo, “El río Magdalena”.
4. Rossi, La arquitectura de la ciudad.
5. Guzmán, La ciudad del río.
6. Morris, Historia de la forma urbana.
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11. Mecham, The real de minas as a political institution.
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