

1 Thessalonians

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1 Thess is widely accepted as a genuine epistle of Paul. We may next ask whether it contains editorial material added before the text was widely circulated, and thus escapes detection by manuscript comparison.¹ I here consider the likely interpolations, and then, with the aid of stylistic analysis,² investigate their possible authorship.

Passages Requiring Consideration

1 Thess 2:13-16. The argument of Pearson in 1971³ I regard as decisive; if further argument was needed, it was given by Walker in 2001.⁴ The seeming reference to the destruction of the Temple in 70 is anachronistic for Paul (died c59), and its hostility toward “the Jews” is uncharacteristic of him elsewhere. The value of this passage is that it places the Pauline editorial process after 70; my working hypothesis is c71.

1 Thess 5:9-10, “the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us;” the only passage in 1 Thess which mentions the Atonement doctrine.⁵

1 Thess 4:9-5:22 are formally anomalous.⁶

1 Thess 5:27, a command to read the letter more widely, occurs in other Pauline letters. Some are suspect on other grounds. It is likely that all are editorial additions, meant to universalize the originally recipient-specific letters. This passage and 2:13-16 I consider not to require argument here. The others I take up in the above order.

¹For the concept of a growth text, see Walker **Evidence** 23-24. To demand manuscript evidence for interpolation proposals is to fail to distinguish between higher and lower criticism. Authorial and editorial additions prior to general circulation are *formative*, not corruptive.

²See Brooks **Chinese**. I am grateful to Keith Yoder for the test results here reported.

³Preceded by Eckart in 1961; see Walker **Interpolations** 20n and Collins **Studies** 101f. The earliest challenge was that of Loisy in 1922; for a summary, see **Studies** 99f.

⁴Walker 210-220. Baur, who did not regard this passage as interpolated, rejected the entire letter because of that anachronism and other details. See Baur **Paul** 2/86f and 2/314f.

⁵Present in Mark only at Mk 10:45 and 13:24, both probably in a late stratum of Mark.

⁶4:1-8, 10b-12, 4:18, 5:1-11, 5:12-22, and 5:27 were challenged by Friedrich (1973) and Eckart (1961); see Walker **Interpolations** 19-20.

1 Thess 1:10b and 5:9-10

F F Bruce puts it this way:

This summary of what constituted the Thessalonians' conversion experience lacks some distinctive notes of Paul's teaching. We note the absence of any mention of *theologia crucis* (contrast, eg, Gal 3:1, 6:14, 1 Cor 2:2, Rom 3:25) – it figures in the Thessalonian correspondence only at 1 Thess 5:10.

A seeming second possibility, 1 Thess 1:10b, claims only that Jesus “delivers us from the wrath to come.” This is what Didache 9:3 and 10:2 speak of, “the knowledge . . . which you revealed to us through your servant Jesus,” and what Jesus himself provides in Mark 10:18, in answer to a question about eternal life. The Mk 10:19 answer is the Decalogue, minus its sacrificial half, and with the addition of “fraud.” That is, the answer of the Markan Jesus is that ethical behavior is what saves the individual.⁷

The inauthenticity of 5:9-10 must follow from that of 4:9-5:22, considered below. We do not expect to find an authentic passage inserted into an inauthentic one. Then the Atonement doctrine is lacking in this, the earliest of Paul's letters.

1 Thess 4:9–5:22

I propose to argue that this section of 1 Thess comprises four editorial additions.⁸ As a whole, they clearly interrupt a concluding message on holiness:

1 Thess 4:7. For God called us not for uncleanness, but in *sanctification*. [8] Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who gives his holy spirit to you.

[4:9-12, 4:13-18, 5:1-11, 5:12-22] [on various topics; see below]⁹

[5:13] And may the God of peace himself *sanctify* you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The resumption of the 4:7-8 “sanctification” topic at 5:13 is obvious. These passages together violate another convention: *λοιπὸν* “finally” occurs in Pauline (2 Cor 13:11, Gal 6:17, Php 4:8,¹⁰) and deutero-Pauline letters (Eph 6:10), but always followed by a *single point* of teaching or of affectionate farewell; it invariably brings the letter to an end. In 1 Thess, however, “finally” introduces a series of topics, identified as such by the itemization marker *περὶ δὲ* (“as for”) or by *δὲ* alone (“but”):

- 4:9 [*περὶ δὲ*] **But concerning** love of the brethren . . .
- 4:13 [*δὲ*] **But** we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep . . .
- 5:1 [*περὶ δὲ*] **But concerning** the times and the seasons, brethren . . .
- 5:12 [*δὲ*] **But** we beseech you, brethren, to know them that labor among you and are over you in the Lord . . .

⁷This is what I have called “Alpha Christianity;” for the term, see Brooks **Two** 39.

⁸Loisy **Birth** 20 regards 4:13-18 and 5:1-11 (4c and 5a) as “a late insertion.”

⁹I note in passing the quotation of 1 Thess 5:2 in a parenthesis at Rev 16:15.

¹⁰For the conflation argument here relied on, see Brooks **Philippi**.

The first passage is reminiscent of the interpolated 1 Cor 13,¹¹ which ranks love above all other considerations. The second and third treat the End Days, topics of ongoing interest. The fourth suggests a more advanced church organization than is found outside the Deutero-Paulines. All this is consistent with a post-Pauline milieu.

The topic-changing markers define subdivisions. I propose the following labels:

4a (1 Thess 4:1-8). Sanctification of Believers, beginning of the original close

4b (1 Thess 4:9-12). Love of the Brethren

4c (1 Thess 4:13-18). Rising of the Dead at the End

5a (1 Thess 5:1-11). The Unknown Time of the End

5b (1 Thess 5:12-22). Obey those who are “over you in the Lord”

5c (1 Thess 5:23-28). Sanctification [resuming and concluding 4a]

The items in **bold** (4b, 4c, 5a, 5b), as noted above, are collectively off-topic.

The Authorship Question

Were these miscellaneous paragraphs written by one, or several, of Paul’s editors? For this question, the BIRD stylistic difference test may offer useful information.¹² In that test, values of **0·50** or less (here **emphasized**) indicate significant similarity.¹³

<i>1 Thess</i>	<i>4b</i>	<i>4c</i>	<i>5a</i>	<i>5b</i>
<i>4b</i>	~	0·69	0·53	0·60
<i>4c</i>	0·69	~	0·41	0·52
<i>5a</i>	0·53	0·41	~	0·67
<i>5b</i>	0·60	0·52	0·67	~

That is, 4c and 5a, the passages having to do with the End Days, are notably similar in style as well.¹⁴ That is hardly surprising. Of greater interest is the *lack* of similarity between these and the rest (though 4c and 5b, at D = 0·52, are quite close).

We may then be dealing here, not with one interpolator, or with two, but with three. We may next ask: Are there known or probable interpolations in the authentic Paulines which closely resemble any of these three additions to 1 Thess, and might have the same origin? We may first compare these four 1 Thess passages (and the interpolated 1 Thess 2:13-16)¹⁵ with some suspicious passages in 1 Corinthians and Galatians, and with several Deutero-Pauline texts, including 2 Thess.¹⁶

¹¹More precisely 1 Cor 12:31b-14:1a. See Walker **Interpolations** 147-165.

¹²For this test, see Brooks **Chinese**.

¹³For a general description, see Brooks **Chinese**. The Greek text here used is NA27.

¹⁴Vindicating the opinion of Loisy **Birth** 362 n3, “a fragment with a style all its own.”

¹⁵The other interpolation here identified, 5:9-10, is too small to test meaningfully.

¹⁶At the head of Chapter 5 (“The Challenge of Thessalonians”) of Robinson **Coming**, Ed Sanders has written, “The chapter is weakened by failure to consider if II Thess is genuine or no.” The next few pages may be regarded as a modest attempt to repair that and similar failures. For more on the “apocalyptic” aspect of the Thessalonians question, see further Holland **Letter**, Krentz **Traditions**.

The crosstable for those comparisons looks like this:

	<i>2Th</i>	<i>1Tim</i>	<i>2Tim</i>	<i>Tit</i>	<i>Gal5b</i>	<i>1C13</i>	<i>1C15</i>	<i>2:13f</i>	<i>4b</i>	<i>4c</i>	<i>5a</i>	<i>5b</i>
<i>2Th</i>	~	0.55	0.57	0.74	0.87	0.95	0.90	0.47	0.80	0.35	0.56	0.51
<i>1Tim</i>	0.55	~	0.65	0.41	0.76	0.83	0.84	0.72	0.78	0.61	0.61	0.54
<i>2Tim</i>	0.57	0.65	~	0.72	0.65	0.82	0.68	0.71	0.61	0.63	0.68	0.36
<i>Tit</i>	0.74	0.41	0.72	~	0.71	0.71	0.97	0.88	0.74	0.81	0.71	0.63
<i>Gal5b</i>	0.87	0.76	0.65	0.71	~	0.51	0.66	0.91	0.47	0.69	0.64	0.53
<i>1C13</i>	0.95	0.83	0.82	0.71	0.51	~	0.68	0.96	0.73	0.85	0.65	0.71
<i>1C15</i>	0.90	0.84	0.68	0.97	0.66	0.68	~	0.90	0.77	0.69	0.63	0.77
<i>2:13f</i>	0.47	0.72	0.71	0.88	0.91	0.96	0.90	~	0.69	0.38	0.49	0.69
<i>4b</i>	0.80	0.78	0.61	0.74	0.47	0.73	0.77	0.69	~	0.69	0.53	0.60
<i>4c</i>	0.35	0.61	0.63	0.81	0.69	0.85	0.69	0.38	0.69	~	0.41	0.52
<i>5a</i>	0.56	0.61	0.68	0.71	0.64	0.65	0.63	0.49	0.53	0.41	~	0.67
<i>5b</i>	0.51	0.54	0.36	0.63	0.53	0.71	0.77	0.69	0.60	0.52	0.67	~

So large a table is hard to read, and it will be helpful to isolate some components.

Of the Pastorals, Easton and Murphy-O'Connor have argued that 2 Tim was the earliest, and that 1 Tim and Titus are closely related.¹⁷ The table shows that 1 Tim and Titus are indeed similar in style. To reduce the table to just those elements:

	<i>1 Tim</i>	<i>Titus</i>
<i>1 Tim</i>	~	0.41
<i>Titus</i>	0.41	~

But neither is similar to anything else on that table.

2 Timothy is stylistically quite close to 1 Thess 5b, and to nothing else on the table. We may isolate that relationship as:

	<i>2 Tim</i>	<i>5b</i>
<i>2 Tim</i>	~	0.36
<i>5b</i>	0.36	~

If the reasons earlier given for Timothy as the author of 2 Timothy (but not of the other two Pastorals)¹⁸ are sound, then Timothy may also have contributed 1 Thess 5b, the passage on obedience to superiors (a typical Deutero-Pauline theme).

The middle two passages, 1 Thess 4c and 5a, which are similar to each other both in theme and, as recently discovered, also in style, show somewhat wider connections. Here is everything on the large table to which these two passages are closely similar:

¹⁷For references, see Brooks **Editors** 124.

¹⁸See Brooks **Philippi** 112, also **Brooks Editors** 122f.

	<i>2Th</i>	<i>2:13f</i>	<i>4c</i>	<i>5a</i>
<i>2Th</i>	~	0·47	0·35	0·56
<i>2:13f</i>	0·47	~	0·38	0·49
<i>4c</i>	0·35	0·38	~	0·41
<i>5a</i>	0·56	0·49	0·41	~

The cluster of similarities is not perfect, but it is suggestive. It suggests that one person may have written 1 Thess 2:13-16 and the two End Days passages in 1 Thess. That two of these three passages are also close to 2 Thess is not surprising: whoever added 4c and 5a to 1 Thess was concerned to provide more detail about the nature of the End Days, and the principal focus of 2 Thess is precisely to correct previous wrong ideas about the End Days, and to provide new information, such as the Last Conflict.¹⁹ The above stylistic affinities are thus intelligible also in doctrinal terms.

The person perhaps most likely to have written 2 Thess is Silvanus, a cosigner of the original 1 Thess. I here extend that proposal to 1 Thess 2:13-16 and 4:13–5:11.

Of the proposed 1 Thess interpolations, we have still to deal with 4b. It has a single stylistic contact among the texts included in the above large table:

	<i>Gal56</i>	<i>4b</i>
<i>Gal56</i>	~	0·47
<i>4b</i>	0·47	~

That connection is less surprising than it may at first appear. Gal 5:13-6:10, first proposed as an interpolation by O’Neill in 1972, inserts an Alpha text (an altered version of the Two Ways list) into the middle of a diatribe against circumcision. That is, it argues implicitly for the value of concord over that of Alpha/Beta disputation. The emphasis on brotherhood in 1 Thess 4b can be seen as making a similar point. So might the Love chapter, 1 Cor 13. That passage has no very close stylistic contacts in the group here considered, but it does have a suggestive near miss:

	<i>Gal56</i>	<i>1C13</i>	<i>4b</i>
<i>Gal56</i>	~	(0·51)	0·47
<i>1C13</i>	(0·51)	~	0·73
<i>4b</i>	0·47	0·73	~

It should be remembered that BIRD is not an authorship test, since the style of any author can vary with genre and other considerations. Local effects are here very likely. The Galatians passage may be affected by the Two Ways list of which it is a variant,²⁰ and 1 Cor 13 by its near-poetic diction.

¹⁹The Last Conflict is of course a main feature of Revelation; compare n9, above. These are the only points of contact between Revelation and anything in the larger Pauline corpus.

²⁰For the wide adaptation of that early Alpha document see Brooks **Two**.

The default expectation for interpolations in 1 Cor will probably be the co-signer of that letter, the Corinthian Sosthenes, an ally of Paul's in that city. He may then be the least unlikely suggestion for the authorship of these three interpolations.

These, then, are the suggestions for the authorship of interpolations in 1 Thess:

- 1:10b (2:13-16 (Destruction of the Temple); probably Silvanus
- 4:9-12 (Love of the Brethren); possibly Sosthenes
- 4:13-18 (Rising of the Dead at the End); probably Silvanus
- 5:1-11 (The Unknown Time of the End); probably Silvanus
- 5:12-22 (Submission to Superiors); probably Timothy²¹

Influences. Writers have a default style, but they may also be affected by what they have in mind as they write: their own previous paragraph, a paragraph of similar nature that they interpolated into another Pauline letter, or a passage of Paul that they have in mind as expressing the true Pauline viewpoint. For most readers, Romans is Paul's final theological summa; the ultimate Paul. It is thus not surprising to find that some of these passages show detailed similarities with Romans.²²

Theological Implications

The above arguments adjust our sense of Paul as of 1 Thess in these ways:

The Second Coming is a confident expectation in 1 Thess 1:9-10a. The editorial 4:13-5:11 amounts to an assurance in the face of later doubt, and gives greater detail.²³

The Jews. The hostile view of 2:13-16 vanishes with that passage. What remains is Paul's hope for the conversion of the Jews in Rom 11:1-12. Of Paul, we may say that he abandoned his youthful zeal for the Law, but not his sense of Jewish identity.

Sanctification. Given its emphatic placement at the end of the letter, this may be the position most strongly held by Paul at this early period (1 Thess is most often dated to c51).²⁴ The focus on the sin of sexual contact, which remains an emphasis as late as Romans 6:12f, is compatible with Paul's Jewish heritage; the Hebrew Scriptures teem with denunciations of Israel for "whoring after false gods" or for marrying outside the tribe. It is these sexual sins of which Paul warns his readers in 1 Thess 4a, in order that the return of Jesus will not find the Thessalonians liable to judgement.

The final test of any reconstruction is to read the reconstruction. It will thus be helpful at this point to see what 1 Thess looks like, minus these interpolations.

²¹On qualifications for superiors, see 1 Tim 3:1-13, 5:17-25, and Titus 1:5-9 (Ware §112).

²²For 1 Thess 5:1-11 and Rom 13:11-14, see Boring 182; for 1 Thess 5:12-22 and Rom 12:9-18, see Boring 186. In a different direction: for 1 Thess 4:9-12 and Mark, see Bruce 90. This last may represent an attempt to harmonize Paul with the rival Gospel tradition.

²³Details of the End also occur at 1 Cor 15:20-28 (see Ware §88), but this chapter is suspect as departing from the rubric of spiritual gifts, stated at 1 Cor 12:1.

²⁴Knox **Chapters** 87f argues for a much earlier date; so also Lüdemann **Earliest**. This view seems not to have carried the field. It seems to me to solve the problem of Pauline chronology in a way that can be improved on by taking fuller note of evidence to be found in other texts. For one step in that alternative argument, see Brooks **Jerusalem**.

The Original 1 Thessalonians

[A. PRAISE OF THE THESSALONIANS]

[1:1] Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. [2] We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention [of you] in our prayers; [3] remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; [4] knowing, brethren beloved of God, your election, [5] how that our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and [in] much assurance; even as ye know what manner of men we showed ourselves toward you for your sake. [6] And ye became imitators of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit; [7] so that ye became an example to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia. [8] For from you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith toward God is gone forth; so that we need not to speak anything. [9] For they themselves report concerning us what manner of entering in we had unto you; and how ye turned unto God from idols, to serve a living and true God [10a] and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead.

[B. THE GOSPEL OF GOD]

[2:1] For yourselves, brethren, know our entering in unto you, that it hath not been found vain: [2] but having suffered before and been shamefully treated, as ye know, at Philippi, we waxed bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God in much conflict. [3] For our exhortation [is] not of error, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: [4] but even as we have been approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts. [5] For neither at any time were we found using words of flattery, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness; [6] nor seeking glory of men, neither from you nor from others, when we might have claimed authority as apostles of Christ. [7] But we were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children: [8] even so, being affectionately desirous of you, we were well pleased to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were become very dear to us.

[9] For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: working night and day, that we might not burden any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. [10] Ye are witnesses, and God [also], how holily and righteously and unblameably we behaved ourselves toward you that believe: [11] as ye know how we [dealt with] each one of you, as a father with his own children, exhorting you, and encouraging, and testifying, [12] to the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory. [17] But we, brethren, being bereaved of you for a short season, in presence not in heart, endeavored the more exceedingly to see your face with great desire: [18] because we would fain have come unto you, I Paul once and again; and Satan hindered us. [19] For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? [20] For ye are our glory and our joy.

[C. PAUL'S CONCERN FOR THE THESSALONIANS' STEADFASTNESS]

[3:1] Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left behind at Athens alone; [2] and sent Timothy, our brother and God's minister in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort [you] concerning your faith; [3] that no man be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that hereunto we are appointed. [4] For verily, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we are to suffer affliction; even as it came to pass, and ye know. [5] For this cause I also, when I could no longer forbear, sent that I might know your faith, lest by any means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor should be in vain. [6] But when Timothy came even now unto us from you, and brought us glad tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, longing to see us, even as we also you; [7] for this cause, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our distress and affliction through your faith: [8] for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. [9] For what thanksgiving can we render again unto God for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; [10] night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face, and may perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

[D. BLESSING]

[11] Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way unto you: [12] and the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we also [do] toward you; [13] to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

[E. CLOSING EXHORTATION: SANCTIFICATION]

[4:1] Finally then, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as ye received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, even as ye do walk, – that ye abound more and more. [2] For ye know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus. [3] For this is the will of God, [even] your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication; [4] that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who know not God; [6] that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter: because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified. [7] For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. [8] Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth his Holy Spirit unto you. [5:23] And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. [24] Faithful is he that calleth you, who will also do it.

[F. FINAL PERSONAL GREETING]

[25] Brethren, pray for us. [26] Salute all the brethren with a holy kiss. [28] The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.



The Rhetorical Structure of 1 Thessalonians

A point of general literary interest is the internal structure of speeches. For example, of any speech we can ask whether, and where, it is stylistically consecutive. Taking the above divisions, and with the caution that segments D and F are below the size at which the BIRD test is fully functional, we have this table for 1 Thessalonians:

<i>1 Th</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>A</i>	~	0.51	0.60	0.49	0.47	0.41
<i>B</i>	0.51	~	0.82	0.75	0.76	0.56
<i>C</i>	0.60	0.82	~	0.65	0.77	0.72
<i>D</i>	0.49	0.75	0.65	~	0.75	0.45
<i>E</i>	0.47	0.76	0.77	0.75	~	0.53
<i>F</i>	0.41	0.56	0.72	0.45	0.53	~

Reading down the diagonal, we find that *no two adjacent sections* are stylistically continuous. 1 Thess is thus not a narrative, and it is not an argument. It has a different logic. What logic it does have is more easily seen if we drop the sections (B and C) which have *no* contacts within 1 Thess, and look at the rest:

<i>1 Th</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>A</i>	~	0.49	0.47	0.41
<i>D</i>	0.49	~	0.75	0.45
<i>E</i>	0.47	0.75	~	0.53
<i>F</i>	0.41	0.45	0.53	~

We get a “template” structure, where each later segment resembles the first, but none resembles any of the others.²⁵ In substance, A is the opening greeting, thinking of the Thessalonians, and D through F are versions of farewell, also addressed to them in a personal way, but making separate points (D a wish for increase; E a plea for sanctity of life; F: greetings. These are all plausible at the end of a letter, but none of them depends on (or, here, is stylistically similar to) the others. What they have in common is that they look back to the initial greeting: they are personal rather than instructive.

As for the middle sections, they might be instructive, but they are not. They are discussions of *Paul’s own relation* to the Thessalonians; his concern for them, his care not to be a burden to them,²⁶ his concern lest they cease to be a credit to him. They are not about the Thessalonians, and they are not about God. They are about Paul.

Paul is very often his own subject. In his view of things, Jesus effectively replaces God, and it is not too much to say that Paul himself comes very near to eclipsing Jesus. “Be imitators of me, as I am of God” (1 Cor 4:16, 11:1) is Paul’s recurring message. That same focus also characterizes the other early letters: Philemon and Philippians.

²⁵Compare the somewhat similar situation in Brooks **We**

²⁶For this theme of “not a burden,” compare Brooks **Interruptions** 144.

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