

SPACE-Peptide succesfully improves dermis penetration of amniotic membrane stem cell metabolite product as antiaging

Diah Indah Kumala Sari^{1*}, Safira Yulita Fazadini²

^{1,2}Department Pharmacy, Faculty of Health Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Lamongan, Lamongan, 62211, Indonesia.

*Corresponding Author: diah_indah_kumala_sari@umla.ac.id

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ABSTRACT: Amniotic Membrane Stem Cell Metabolite Product (AMSCMP) contains a 75.33 kDa protein, making dermal penetration difficult. The Skin Penetrating and Cell Entering (SPACE) peptide facilitates protein molecule penetration reversibly. This study aimed to assess the penetration depth and skin irritation level of AMSCMP combined with SPACE peptide. In vivo experiments were conducted on mice, evaluating penetration via staining depth and irritation through edema, polymorphonuclear (PMN) cell levels, and tissue degeneration. Penetration results showed distinct fluorescence differences, where formulas with the SPACE peptide (F2, F3, F4) achieved penetration depths exceeding 1,200 μm , whereas the control without SPACE (F1) showed no measurable penetration. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant difference in penetration depth among formulas ($p < 0.05$), proving that SPACE peptide significantly enhanced active ingredient delivery into the skin. Regarding skin safety, F1 and F2 showed an irritation index of zero (no irritation), while F3 and F4 yielded a score of 1.3, falling into the very mild irritation category. However, statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in irritation scores across all formulations ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the addition of SPACE peptide did not induce meaningful skin irritation. Conclusion: The addition of SPACE peptide significantly enhances the skin penetration of AMSCMP while maintaining an exceptionally mild, non-significant irritation profile suitable for topical application.

KEYWORDS: AMSCMP; irritation; penetration; SPACE-Peptide.

INTRODUCTION

Amniotic Membrane Stem Cell Metabolite Product (AMSCMP) is a metabolite derived from totipotent stem cell cultured in a conditioned medium. This process produces a bioactive metabolite rich in various growth factors and cytokines. One of the major bioactive components of AMSCMP is Transforming Growth Factor- β (TGF- β) which plays a crucial role in skin rejuvenation. TGF- β stimulates dermal fibroblast proliferation and enhances the synthesis of collagen, particularly types I and III, thereby improving the structural integrity and protective function of the skin [1]. Furthermore TGF- β promotes the synthesis of laminin V, collagen IV, and collagen VII while inhibiting the activity of Matrix Metalloproteinases (MMPs), thereby reducing extracellular matrix degradation. Previous studies have demonstrated that TGF- β contributes to maintaining healthy and youthful skin by preserving fibroblast density within the dermis. Despite these therapeutic benefits, the clinical application of AMSCMP remains challenging because it contains protein with a molecular weight of approximately 75.33 kDa, which limits their ability to penetrate the dermal layer effectively [2]. Achieving optimal therapeutic outcomes required efficient transdermal delivery of active compounds across the skin barrier. To address this challenge, considerable effort has been directed toward improving the penetration of active ingredients, thereby enhancing the bioavailability and therapeutic efficacy of topical formulations. However, successful transdermal drug delivery depends on several critical factors, including formulation optimization to accommodate regional variation in skin properties, the complex structure and physiology of the skin, physiological changes induced by environmental exposure or pathological conditions, and interindividual variability. These factors collectively influence the penetration efficiency and overall therapeutic performance of transdermal delivery systems [3].

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Skin Penetrating and Cell Entering (SPACE) is known to increase the penetration of protein molecules into the skin, inducing changes in the alpha helix and beta sheet folds of these structure. The advantage of SPACE it is reversible its reversible and non irritating nature ti the skin. With the addition of SPACE, the AMSCMP mechanism can by pass the route of directing its effects on the intracellular pathway by loosening the secondary structure through polypeptide bonds stabilized by C-O and N-H groups [4]. After passing through the stratum corneum, AMSCMP interacts with specific receptors on keratinocytes and triggers a cytokine signaling cascade that affects fibroblasts and other cells in the dermis, thereby impacting collagen density. This study carried out there stages of evaluation, penetration and irritation testing as safety standards [5].

Improvements in skin texture, appearance, and psychological well-being have contributed to the growing use of cosmetic and personal care products across both genders. However, increased usage has led to a higher incidence of unwanted effects, mainly mild to moderate skin irritation, with severe reactions occurring in sensitive populations such as children. Although cosmetic ingredients undergo skin irritation testing before marketing, testing of final formulations is not mandatory for manufacturers

Amniotic membrane stem cell metabolite product (AMSC-MP) contains a variety of growth factors, cytokines, and other bioactive biomolecules with potential antiaging benefits, particularly in promoting skin rejuvenation and improving age-related skin changes. Previous clinical and topical studies have reported the beneficial effects of AMSC-MP or conditioned medium on photoaging-associated parameters. Nevertheless, the topical delivery of AMSC-MP remains challenging because many of its active constituents are hydrophilic macromolecules with high molecular weights, which hinder their penetration through the stratum corneum. Consequently, despite its promising biological potential, the effective translation of AMSC-MP into topical dosage forms is still limited by poor skin penetration. This was the latest research to increase penetration of the active ingredients AMSCMP which is added with a SPACE Peptide enhancer to deliver therapeutic target as antiaging [6].

▪ MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials

Amniotic Membrane Stem Cell Conditioned Medium Powder (AMSCMP) was obtained from the Tissue Bank of Dr. Soetomo General Academic Hospital (Surabaya, Indonesia). Skin-Penetrating and Cell-Entering (SPACE) peptide was purchased from Sigma-Aldrich (St. Louis, MO, USA). Ethanol 96% was supplied by Merck (sourced through PT Sumber Ilmiah Persada, Indonesia), and phenoxyethanol was acquired from PT Multiverse Anugerah Chemindo (Indonesia).

Healthy male BALB/c mice (*Mus musculus*), aged 6–8 weeks and weighing 20–25 g, were sourced from the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia. It was utilized for in vivo dermal evaluations. Included animals were screened to ensure the absence of pre-existing skin diseases, dermatological lesions, or post-shaving skin trauma. Tools Olympus FX-100 Fluoresence microscope and confocal miscroscope.

Animals conditioning

The animals were maintained under supervised conditions in a controlled holding facility, with a 24 hour light cycle (lights on from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.), ambient temperature of $28 \pm 2^\circ\text{C}$, and relative humidity of $75 \pm 5\%$. The mice were housed in transparent plexiglass cages and given one week to acclimate to the cage environment before the experiment began. They received standard food and air without restriction. All measures to ensure animal comfort were kept to a minimum throughout the procedure.

All experiments complied with guidelines for the care and use of laboratory animals and received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Airlangga University, Surabaya, Indonesia. In this study, we attempted to use the lowest possible number of animals and irritants with ethical clearance No.2.KE.088.04.2019.

Formulation of AMSCMP and SPACE peptide topical preparation

The topical preparation was formulated using AMSCMP and SPACE peptide. Briefly, 25 mg of SPACE peptide powder was completely dissolved in 1,000 mL of Phosphate-Buffered Saline (PBS) to obtain a stock solution. AMSCMP was subsequently incorporated into the PBS–SPACE peptide mixture according to the predetermined concentrations specified in Table 1. Finally, phenoxyethanol was added to the mixture as a preservative, and the solution was gently agitated until complete homogenization was achieved.

Table 1. Formula of AMSCMP with SPACE Peptide.

Material	Function	Formula (%)			
		1	2	3	4
AMSCMP	Active ingredients	0.008	0.008	0.008	0.008
SPACE	Enhancer	0.000	0.008	0.016	0.024
Phenoxyethanol	Preservatif	0.500	0.500	0.500	0.500
PBS	solvent	100	100	100	100

*AMSCMP (freeze dried form)

*PBS (Phosphat Buffer Saline)

In vivo penetration test

Using an Olympus FX-100 microscope, 1.25 mg ketamine anesthetic solution was injected intraperitoneally to render the mice unconscious. The mice's hair was then shaved on their backs, measuring 2 x 2 cm, and then the sample was applied. Each test was carried out at 1, 3, and 5 hours, then the mice were sacrificed by dislocation. The sample-applied area was cut, the tissue was washed using absolute alcohol, and embedded into a 1 mm² holder block with a thickness of 5 µm. A total of twelve male mice were used in this study. The animals were randomly divided into four experimental groups, with three mice in each group. The penetration depth was then visualized using the rhodamine B marker and observed with a fluorescent microscope.

In vivo dermal penetration study

Twelve healthy male BALB/c mice were randomly allocated into four experimental groups (n = 3 per group). Prior to treatment, anesthesia was induced via an intraperitoneal injection of ketamine solution at a dose of 1.25 mg per mouse. The dorsal hair of each mouse was carefully shaved over an area of 2 x 2 cm, ensuring no skin trauma occurred. The respective formulations containing Rhodamine B as a fluorescent tracer were topically applied to the shaved dorsal region. Penetration depth was evaluated at predetermined time intervals of 1, 3, and 5 hours post-application. At each time point, the animals were humanely sacrificed via cervical dislocation. The treated skin tissue was excised, thoroughly rinsed with absolute ethanol to remove residual surface formulation, and embedded into tissue block holders. Cryosections with a thickness of 5 µm were prepared and mounted. The intensity, distribution, and dermal penetration depth of the Rhodamine B fluorescent marker were evaluated using an FX-100 fluorescence microscope and a confocal laser scanning microscope system (Olympus Corp., Tokyo, Japan).

RESULTS

Penetration test

Penetration testing was conducted to evaluate the ability of the formulation to deliver the active substance across the membrane and to assess the effect of adding a penetration enhancer on the amount of active substance successfully penetrated. The use of a penetration enhancer in topical formulations is intended to increase the diffusion of the active substance through the barrier layer, thereby improving the effectiveness of active substance delivery to the target site. Therefore, the results of the penetration test constitute an important parameter in determining the success of the developed formulation. The test was carried out under a microscope where the uppermost skin structures were the epidermis, dermis, and hypodermis. The lines in Figure 1 (a, b, and c) indicate the penetration depth, where the numbers can be seen in Table 2. The results of statistical analysis using IBM 25 showed a sig value <0.05 at all times (1, 3 and 5 hours).

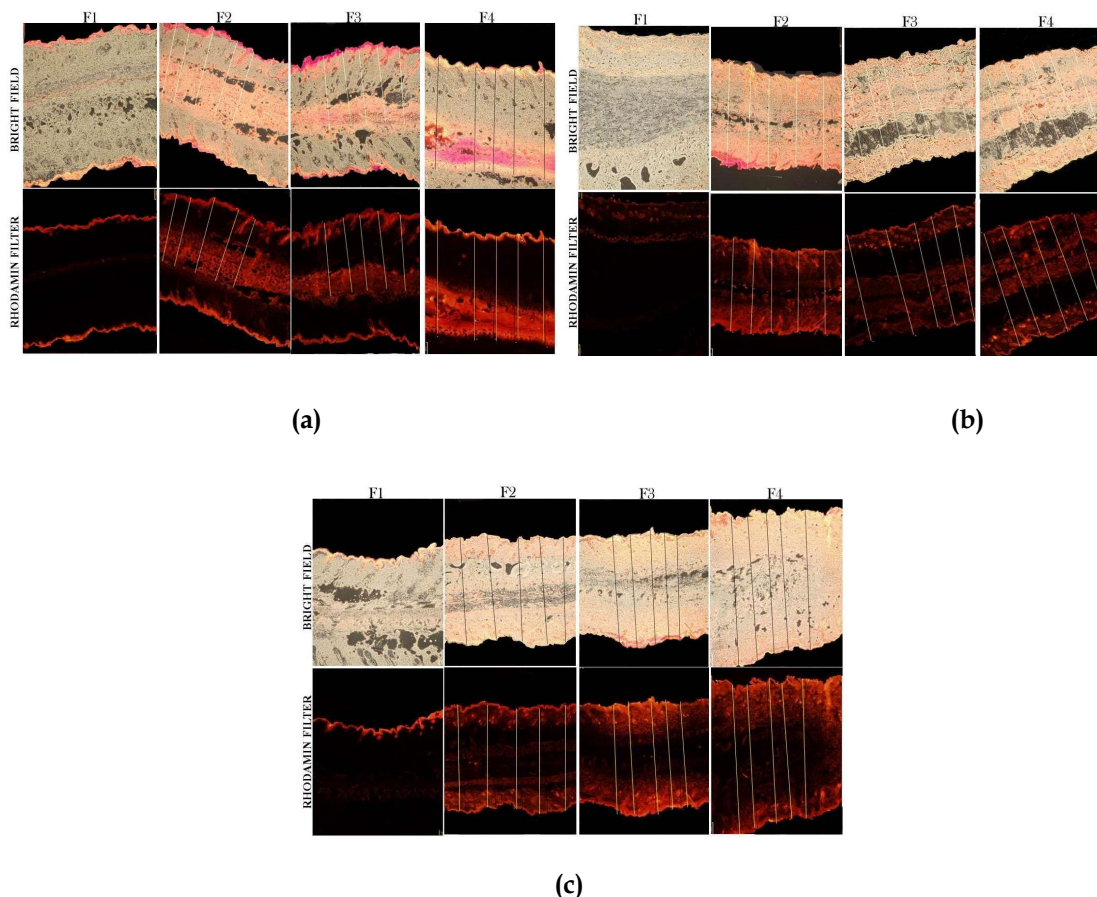


Figure 1. (a) Penetration test results on mice dorsal skin at 1 hour; (b) Penetration test results on mice dorsal skin at 3 hours (c) Penetration test results on mice dorsal skin at 5 hours.

Table 2. In vivo penetration depth test of AMSCMP formula on the back skin of mice at 1, 3, and 5 hours.

Formula	Time (h)	Average skin penetration (μm) $\pm$ SD*
F1	1 h	0
	3 h	0
	5 h	0
F2	1 h	1250 $\pm$ 17.55
	3 h	1435 $\pm$ 9.07
	5 h	1326 $\pm$ 17.77
F3	1 h	1361 $\pm$ 59.53
	3 h	1540 $\pm$ 45.96
	5 h	1670 $\pm$ 36.82
F4	1 h	1714 $\pm$ 101.83
	3 h	1948 $\pm$ 3.78
	5 h	1796 $\pm$ 52.84

Irritation test

In this study, AMSCMP was formulated as a solution containing SPACE peptide in PBS and only phenoxyethanol as a preservative. The solution was then applied to the backs of mice, and the results were observed at 24 hours. The results showed that F3 and F4 had edema, PMN, and degenerative changes. Furthermore, the irritation score was averaged, with a score of 1.3, categorized as very mild irritation.

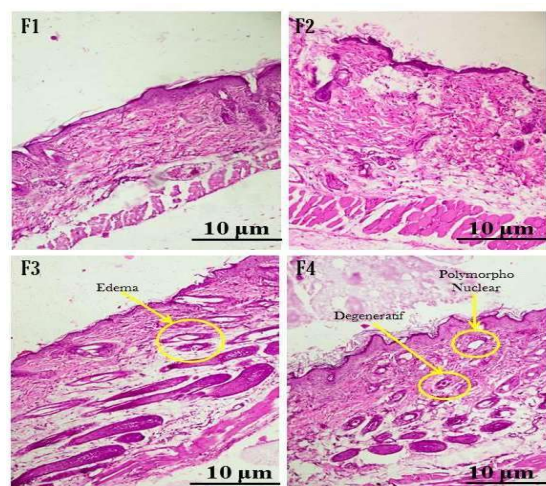


Figure 1. irritation test result on the back skin of mice after 24 hrs.

Table 3. In vivo Irritation test of AMSCMP formula on the back skin of mice at 24 hours

Parameters	F1			F2			F3			F4		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Edema	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
Polymorphonuclear	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0
Degenerative	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Total	0			0			1.3			1.3		

DISCUSSION

Penetration data was obtained at 1, 3, and 5 hours for each sample, and differences were observed. The results are in Table 2 and Figures 1 (a and b). The deeper the penetration value into the tissue, the longer it takes for the skin structure to be loosened by the C-O and N-H groups, resulting in deeper penetration of AMSCMP. SPACE delivery can permeate through the skin barrier, extending from the epidermis to the hypodermis. The depth and extent of SPACE permeation into the skin depend on the concentration applied. In vivo studies, demonstrated that peptide enhancers were able to penetrate the entire stratum corneum and traverse all skin layers following topical application. This effect results from hydrogen bonds and van der Waals forces that stabilize the skin's rigid secondary structure. One-way ANOVA analysis showed a significant difference in penetration depth at 1 hour (sig. [0.000] < 0.05); a significant difference in penetration depth at hour 3 (sig. [0.000] < 0.05); and a significant difference in penetration depth at hour 5 (sig. [0.000] < 0.05). A post hoc test was then performed.

The penetration test was performed to evaluate the ability of each formulation to deliver the active substance across the membrane. The results demonstrated that the cumulative amount of active substance penetrating the membrane increased progressively throughout the observation period in all formulations. This indicates that the active substance was released from the formulation and diffused across the membrane over time. Among the tested formulations, the formulation containing SPACE exhibited the highest cumulative penetration compared with the other formulations. This finding suggests that the incorporation of SPACE enhanced the penetration of the active substance through the membrane. In contrast, the formulation without SPACE showed a lower penetration value, indicating that the absence of a penetration enhancer limited the diffusion of the active substance across the membrane barrier [7]. The improved penetration observed in the SPACE-containing formulation may be attributed to the role of SPACE as a penetration enhancer, which facilitates the transport of the active substance by altering the barrier characteristics of the membrane [8]. Therefore, the addition of SPACE contributed positively to the penetration performance of the developed topical formulation [9].

Skin irritation risk is a key factor in cosmeceutical SPACE peptide design. Lim et al. reported that increased lipophilicity of Argireline did not significantly influence skin irritation, while structural modification improved skin permeation [10]. The enhanced skin permeation observed after structural modification of Argireline may be explained by alterations in the peptide's physicochemical properties, particularly the reduced zwitterionic character, increased affinity for the stratum corneum, and improved partitioning into the lipid matrix of the skin. Native Argireline is highly hydrophilic, charged, and relatively large in molecular size, all of which limit its ability to penetrate the lipophilic barrier of the stratum corneum. When the peptide structure is modified to increase lipophilicity while reducing its tendency to exist in a zwitterionic form, the molecule can more readily partition from the vehicle into the lipid domains of the stratum corneum [11]. As a result, diffusion across the skin barrier becomes more efficient, leading to a greater amount of peptide permeating the membrane. In line with this explanation, Lim et al. reported that lipophilic analogs of Argireline exhibited higher skin permeation than the parent peptide.

Nevertheless, skin irritation is not determined solely by increased lipophilicity or by the greater amount of compound penetrating the skin. Rather, irritation is more closely associated with the extent to which a substance disrupts skin barrier integrity, extracts intercellular lipids, denatures proteins, induces keratinocyte stress, or triggers local inflammatory responses. In cosmetic peptides such as Argireline and SPACE, the increase in permeation appears to result primarily from improved molecular interactions with skin components rather than from substantial disruption of the barrier structure [12],[13]. In other words, structural modification may enhance the ability of the molecule to enter the skin without necessarily causing severe disturbance to the intercellular lipid organization that commonly contributes to irritation. This interpretation is consistent with reports showing that several skin-penetrating peptides, including SPACE, can enhance dermal delivery while exerting minimal effects on barrier integrity and maintaining a relatively low irritation potential. The histopathology scoring results were semi-quantitative. No significant differences were found. The results are shown in Table 3 and Figure 2. SPACE has a very low irritation value, so it is still permitted for use within certain limits. This is supported by *in vitro* studies showing that the peptide has very low levels of toxicity and is well tolerated [14].

SPACE peptide can potentially cause irritation, but the mechanism is usually indirect and barrier-related, not because the peptide is inherently a classic "corrosive irritant". Increased interaction with the stratum corneum can disturb barrier homeostasis. SPACE peptide is designed as a skin-penetrating peptide, meaning that it enhances the transport of molecules across the skin barrier [15]. To do this, the peptide must interact with components of the stratum corneum, especially intercellular lipids and possibly keratin-rich corneocytes. If this interaction becomes too strong particularly at higher concentrations or after repeated application it may partially disturb the highly organized lipid structure of the stratum corneum. Even a mild disruption of this barrier can increase Transepidermal Water Loss (TEWL), reduce water retention, and make the skin more susceptible to burning, stinging, erythema, or dryness [16]. Skin penetrating peptides often work by improving molecular interaction with biological membranes or skin proteins. Although this can enhance delivery, excessive interaction with cell membranes may alter membrane fluidity or cellular homeostasis [17]. In keratinocytes, such disturbance may trigger subclinical cellular stress, followed by the release of inflammatory mediators such as IL-1 α , TNF- α , or other cytokines [18]. Once this occurs, the skin may show signs of irritation, including redness, discomfort, or mild inflammation. Thus, the irritation potential of SPACE peptide is likely dose-dependent and formulation-dependent rather than an unavoidable intrinsic property of the peptide itself. In practice, irritation is rarely caused by the peptide alone. It is usually influenced by SPACE concentration, duration and frequency of application, vehicle composition (gel, cream, ethanol-containing system, ethosomes, surfactants, etc.), co-administered active ingredients, skin condition (intact, damaged, dry, or sensitive skin). For example, if SPACE is incorporated into a formulation containing surfactants, alcohol, or other penetration-promoting excipients, the overall barrier-disrupting effect may become greater than that of SPACE alone. In that situation, the observed irritation may reflect the combined effect of the delivery system, not solely the peptide.

Contact dermatitis is an inflammatory skin condition that occurs due to exposure to irritating substances. Based on how they act on the body, there are two main categories of this condition: both irritant and allergic contact dermatitis. The mechanisms of these two types differ, particularly in the initial phase of inflammation. In allergic contact dermatitis, upon exposure to an irritant, an initial sensitization process occurs, and from the second contact onward, the acquired immune system begins to react. Unlike allergic contact dermatitis, in

irritant contact dermatitis, upon initial exposure to the substance, the pre-existing immune system is activated and triggers an inflammatory process, although it eventually also activates the acquired immune system after multiple exposures. The subsequent processes leading to the formation of eczema lesions are quite similar in allergic contact dermatitis and irritant contact dermatitis, as both exhibit similar patterns of cytokine and chemokine production, cell infiltration, apoptosis, and necrosis. This causes lesions caused by allergic contact dermatitis and irritant contact dermatitis to appear clinically similar and are often difficult to distinguish from one another.

With the numerous irritants present in the workplace, irritant contact dermatitis is one of the most common disorders in today's work context. Therefore, it is a significant issue from both a health and economic perspective. However, there is currently no truly effective therapy for irritant contact dermatitis [19]. Given that current treatments focus solely on symptom management, considerable research is underway to understand and elucidate the complex pathophysiological mechanisms of irritant contact dermatitis and develop potential product of pharmacy especially cosmetics.

The skin irritation potential of the tested formulation was evaluated in accordance with the OECD Test Guideline No. 439 for the in vitro skin irritation: reconstructed human epidermis (RhE) test [20]. According to the literature, the irritation index produced by the SPACE peptide is negligible at 4.8% out of 100%. Calculating this figure, the irritation index in this study was 1.3% out of 100%. Normality test was then performed for the irritation scores, and the results showed that the data were non-parametric, so the Kruskal-Wallis statistical test was performed. Kruskal-Wallis analysis indicated no significant difference in irritation test scores among the formulations ($p = 0.392 > 0.05$). Therefore, no significant variation in irritation responses was observed between the formulas.

CONCLUSION

The study results demonstrated that the addition of SPACE significantly increased the penetration of the formulation. Based on statistical analysis using SPSS, the penetration parameter differed significantly among the formulas ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the addition of SPACE had a significant effect on enhancing the penetration of the active ingredient. In contrast, the irritation test results showed that the addition of SPACE caused irritation in the very mild category. Nevertheless, statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in irritation scores among the formulas ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that the addition of SPACE did not significantly affect the degree of irritation caused. Irritation tests revealed that the addition of SPACE can cause irritation, but only in the very mild category.

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