Christopher T. Mallan (ed.): Studies in Byzantine Epitomes and the Greek Epitomizing Tradition. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2025 (Mnemosyne-Supplements 493). XII, 242 S. € 119.84. ISBN: 978-90-04-73182-0.

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>
> (Photios, *Bibliotheca*, *Prefatory Letter to Tarasios*).[1]

Twenty-first-century generative artificial intelligence and the ninth-century polymathic patriarch of Constantinople concur on the essential usefulness of summaries, though the former expresses the point more succinctly. If it were only a question of utilitarian concision, artificial surpasses human intelligence in some respects, and certainly in speed of production. If, however, the summarizing process itself is deemed a creative endeavour, tailored to a particular readership in a specific socio-cultural setting, in accordance with authorial agenda and intended function, and requiring editorial selectivity, methodological choice and intellectual insight, then the Byzantine epitomator need not fear replacement.

This well-designed and rewarding collection of essays, edited by Christopher Mallan, explores multiple aspects of epitomes and epitomizing with a view to re-evaluating an important component of Byzantine literary culture. Although prior collective publications have more broadly treated forms and modes of abridgement, primarily in Classical literature,[2] the volume under review is the first to be dedicated specifically to epitomes, and to extend inquiry into the Byzantine era. This project is closely aligned with a general attitudinal shift in the study of Byzantine literature, which has recently redefined and re-assessed other categories of textual adaptation, most notably

1 R. Henry (ed.): Photius, Bibliothèque, I. Paris 1959, p. 2.19–24 (Bekker 1.19–22): Χρησιμεύσει δέ σοι δηλονότι τὰ ἐκδεδομένα εἴς τε κεφαλαιώδη μνήμην καὶ ἀνάμνησιν τῶν εἴτε κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἀναλεξάμενος ἐπῆλθες, [...] οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς εὐχερεστέραν ἀνάληψιν τῶν οὔπω τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τῆς σῆς συνέσεως ὑπελθόντων (my translation).

2 See especially M. Horster/C. Reitz (eds.): Condensing Texts – Condensed Texts. Stuttgart 2010 (Palingenesia 98).

metaphrasis.[3] A more embracive approach to Byzantine "rewriting", in all its diversity and complexity, has since culminated in a comprehensive handbook.[4] As Christopher Mallan explains in his Introduction, a basic objective is to move beyond conventional text-critical interest in epitomes largely or purely as indirect textual traditions, especially for the purpose of reconstituting lost or fragmentary works, where fidelity to the source-text is the main or sole criterion of value, an approach that privileges dependence and unoriginality. In contrast, epitomes are viewed here as products of intellectual engagement and creative reception, which should be read and understood as written artefacts of intrinsic significance within their respective socio-literary contexts, comprising authorial agency, adaptive technique and projected audience. In addressing intricate definitional questions, Mallan nuances some terminology-based typologies in modern scholarship, recognizing that, even when narrowly defined, ἐπιτομή and synonymous terms designate texts that vary significantly and defy definitive categorization. Taking account of form, method and intention, his "working definition" (pp. 5–6) admits any self-contained composition that is a specified or demonstrable abridgement of a particular source-text or corpus, with the inferred purpose of enhancing accessibility through one or more means of condensing a text – rewording, excision and/or excerption, separately or in combination. Other, clearly distinct types of digest (hypothesis, diegesis, anthology) are excluded. Although the following studies include cases that combine epitomizing and excerption, some readers may prefer not to follow Mallan in also classifying as 'epitomes' certain collections of unabridged near-verbatim excerpts (exemplified by the *Excerpta Antiqua* of Polybios in Vatican, BAV, Urb. gr. 102). In any case, treating 'epitome'/'epitomizing' as both product and process allows definitional flexibility by acknowledging that some abridgements are the integrative outcome of diverse adaptive methods, some of which may, in places, even supplement or amplify the original text. The contributions to this volume primarily concern the concept and practice of

3 E. g. S. Constantinou/C. Høgel (eds.): Metaphrasis. A Byzantine Concept of Rewriting and its Hagiographical Products. Leiden/Boston 2021 (The Medieval Mediterranean 125); A. P. Alwis/M. Hinterberger/E. Schiffer (eds.): Metaphrasis in Byzantine Literature. Turnhout 2021 (Byzantios 17).

4 S. Efthymiadis: Rewriting. In: S. Papaioannou (ed.): The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature. New York 2021 (Oxford Handbooks), pp. 348–364; and now J. Signes Codoñer/M. Hinterberger/I. Pérez Martín (eds.): The Routledge Handbook of Rewriting in Byzantium. London/New York 2026.

epitomizing Classical secular works during the Byzantine period, mostly around the intersection of textual transmission and literary reception. Overall, these studies are especially successful at locating epitomators and epitomes in institutional settings: imperial court, law school, hospital, monastery or classroom, which were both focal points of scholarly activity and repositories of books. A list of authors and titles is reproduced at the end of this review.

Christopher Mallan's second contribution is a diachronic survey of the Greek epitomizing tradition across a millennium of antiquity, with the aim of distinguishing patterns in typology, production and circulation, and thereby providing a comparative foundation for the Byzantine-era case studies that follow. On the basis of catalogues, databases and word-searchable textual corpora, Mallan compiles and tabulates a dataset of 74 Greek-language epitomes that conformed to previously specified criteria, mostly testimonia to lost works, with a few specimens fully or fragmentarily preserved on papyrus or in manuscript. Two tables present this data chronologically: 1.1, Classical and Hellenistic periods (fourth–first centuries BC), and 1.2, the Roman Imperial era (first–sixth centuries). Although Mallan concedes possible evidential biases, including the higher profile of epitomes associated with famous figures and a privileging of philosophical works, the diverse sample is sufficient for identifying general trends with regard to genre, time and place, and permits judicious observations on authorship, compositional milieu, epitomizing techniques (exemplified by Herakleides Lembos and an anonymous epitomator of Dionysios' *On Literary Composition*), readership and transmission, in light of broader literary developments and selected comparisons with corresponding Latin traditions. Mallan infers that, as documented epitomes coincide with periods of literary-intellectual florescence, particularly the early Hellenistic era and the mid-Principate, they cannot be deemed necessarily symptomatic of cultural stagnation. Notwithstanding obvious caveats, and irrespective of its preliminary function within this volume, Mallan's study furnishes an intrinsically useful resource for future research.

Almost inevitably, Mallan's tables can be supplemented with other specimens that meet his criteria. Although these additions do not substantially alter the patterns he discerns nor controvert his analysis, they may modify assumptions or offer alternative scenarios. For example, regarding Table 1.1, Mallan remarks on "how few of these works are on technical subjects" (p. 33, also p. 37), while noting that the listed epitomes – unremarkably –

reflect the literary-cultural pre-eminence of Athens and Alexandria. It is therefore relevant that, in the late fourth/early third century BC, Kineas, the senior minister of King Pyrrhos of Epirus, epitomized the multi-volume military compendium written by Aineias around the 350s BC (of which only the poliorcetic book survives). If added to the table, this lost ἐπιτομή becomes perhaps the earliest recorded case in a technical field, apparently produced on the semi-barbarized periphery of the Hellenosphere.[5] In the same genre, but towards the opposite chronological terminus, Ourbikios dedicated to Anastasios I (r. 491–518) his extant *Tacticon*, a terse epitome of the first part of Arrian's *Ars tactica* (chapters 1–32), which in turn had probably been addressed to Hadrian in 136/137. In this case, omitted from Table 1.2, the epitomator's grandiose book epigram (= *Anthologia Palatina* 9.210) and the imperial addressee or patron, along with Ourbikios' appended technological contrivance (*Epitedeuma*), collectively raise questions about authorial persona and intent, literary classification and cultural milieu.[6] These examples anticipate medieval epitomes of ancient military writing, notably Psellos' abridgement of Ailianos' *Tactica theoria*.[7]

In the first of seven chapters concerning Byzantine-era authors, genres or fields of knowledge, Laura Pfuntner reconsiders Photios' *Bibliotheca* as a multi-format digest of 386 diverse works, from the fifth century BC to early ninth century, including epitomes. Despite his prefatory remarks on motivation and purpose, Photios' opaque organizational principles, uncertain selec-

5 Ael. Tact. 1.2: ἐξειργάσαντο δὲ τὴν θεωρίαν Αἰνείας τε διὰ πλειόνων ὁ καὶ στρατηγικὰ βιβλία ἱκανὰ συνταξάμενος, ὧν ἐπιτομὴν ὁ Θετταλὸς Κινέας ἐποίησε (ed. H. Köchly/W. Rüstow: Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller. Leipzig 1853–1855, II.1, p. 240). Cf. Cic. ad fam. 9.25.

6 The only edition of the *Tacticon* is to be found in R. Förster: Studien zu den griechischen Taktikern. In: Hermes 12, 1877, pp. 426–471 at pp. 467–471, based on two seventeenth-century descendants of the unique prototype, mid-tenth-century Biblioteca Ambrosiana 119 B (gr. 139), ff. 92v–95v. A new edition and study are in preparation. See further G. Greatrex/H. Elton/R. Burgess: Urbicius' *Epitedeuma*: an Edition, Translation and Commentary. In: BZ 98, 2005, pp. 35–74; P. Rance: The *Etymologicum Magnum* and the "Fragment of Urbicius". In: GRBS 47, 2007, pp. 193–224.

7 Michael Psellos, *Περὶ πολεμικῆς συντάξεως*, edited from a single manuscript (Paris, BnF, gr. 1182) in H. Köchly/W. Rüstow: Griechische Kriegsschriftsteller. Leipzig 1853–1855, II.2, pp. 234–238, with further manuscripts and context in P. Rance: Late Byzantine Elites and Military Literature: Authors, Readers and Manuscripts (11th–15th Centuries). In: G. Theotokis/A. Yıldız (eds.): A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea – Aspects of War, Diplomacy and Military Elites. Leiden/Boston 2018 (History of Warfare 118), pp. 255–286 at 260–262.

tive criteria and inconsistent editorial technique remain under discussion, likewise compositional date and circumstances. Rather than seeking to impose order or rationale, Pfuntner's evaluation of Photios' intentions stresses variety of approach, embracing short descriptions or critical synopses, lengthy and detailed summaries-cum-reviews, and sequences of near-verbatim extracts, mostly devoid of critique. A long-discerned methodological shift from primarily precis and abridgement (cod. 1–233) to excerption (cod. 234–280) prompts questions about programmatic evolution and scholarly collaboration. Consideration of pedagogical motives and contexts moves beyond attempts to assess Photios' fidelity to original texts and recognizes the potential of epitomes to enhance accessibility by simplifying content and accentuating salient material, though whether Photios' prescriptive comments on what and how to read reflect his own – possibly idiosyncratic – tastes or a broader elite intellectual milieu does not seem verifiable.[8]

Melpomeni Vogiatzi investigates epitomes of Aristotle's *Organon*, which, alongside commentaries and paraphrases, were a common form of philosophical writing in the Middle and Late Byzantine periods. She systematically charts diverse and evolving treatments of the six conventional components of the *Organon* in epitomizing compendia, varying in extent, content, style, sources, priorities and/or purpose, and identifies the selective criteria, adaptive methods and literary-philosophical motivations of each author, principally the Anonymous Heiberg, Nikephoros Blemmydes, George Pachymeres and John Chortasmenos, with several other, mostly anonymous compositions. Briefer examination of epitomes of single treatises of the *Organon* signals interest in works/subjects largely excluded from extant compendia and reinforces their scholastic significance. Vogiatzi's analysis addresses, *inter multa alia*: perceptions of the relative importance of Aristotelian treatises (especially *Categories*, *On Interpretation* and *Prior Analytics*) and how different approaches to ancient texts reveal editorial interests and innovations; use and influence of late-antique philosophical-exegetical works (Porphyry's *Eisagoge*, David's *Prolegomena*, John Damascene's *Dialectica*); integration of rhetorical

8 To cited bibliography one might add two substantial studies: J. Schamp: Photios Abréviateur. In: M. Horster/C. Reitz (eds.): Condensing Texts – Condensed Texts. Stuttgart 2010 (Palingenesia 98), pp. 649–734; M. Losacco: Photius, la *Bibliothèque*, et au-delà: l'état de la recherche, l'usage des classiques et les préfaces du corpus. In: B. Flusin/J.-C. Cheynet (eds.): Autour du *Premier humanisme byzantin* & des *Cinq études sur le XI^e siècle*, quarante ans après Paul Lemerle. Paris 2017 (Travaux et mémoires 21.2), pp. 235–308.

arguments and terminology into philosophical discourse; the role of epitomes, through concision and clarification, in explicating or replacing curricular texts, and the value placed on preparatory instruction in logic. Although Vogiatzi characterizes her contribution as "only a first glance into a tradition" (p. 105), this brief review could not do justice to the scope and insight of her chapter.

The two following chapters on medicine and law treat what might be termed 'professional literature', even if some compositions were addressed to or consulted by laypersons. Their widespread compilation and use, apparently throughout the Byzantine Empire, provide specimens of provincial and peripheral production of epitomes in contrast to the typically narrow orbit of Constantinopolitan literary culture. Isabel Grimm-Stadelmann's comprehensive and bibliographically rich appraisal of medical literature clearly shows how epitomes became flexible media for critical and dynamic engagement with ancient and late-antique textual traditions in response to the shifting nature and settings of clinical practice, the progressive institutionalization and professionalization of medical training and heath care provision, and innovations in theory and praxis, especially in pharmacology and therapeutics, partly motivated by cross-cultural adoption of new techniques and *materia medica*. Grimm-Stadelmann's preference for a content-/context-related typology, rather than chronological arrangement, leads to an especially well-structured exposition of literary and socio-medical developments, including: terminological fluidity and differing presentational options, depending on audience and circumstance, whereby multiple divergent epitomes might coexist alongside their source-text(s); the essential methodology of reducing, compiling and/or restructuring texts, including increasingly experience-based and patient-oriented diagnostic-therapeutic approaches particular to Byzantine medical writing; the role of epitomes in daily practice and clinical-institutional environments, principally in the Middle Byzantine era, including the formation of medical corpora, reference manuals and hospital formularies, as well as the emergence of a category of medical-philosophical epitome that combined anatomical and physiological data with basic concepts of Christian anthropology. An interesting glimpse at examples of post-Byzantine medical epitomes, characterized by continuous evaluation and updating, points to the persistence of "a living and adaptive literature destined for practical use" (p. 109).

Marios Tantalos surveys the profuse tradition of epitomes in secular and canon law, with remarks on their compilation, use and impact in Byzantine legal culture. While it might be unsurprising that the production of such texts partly coincides with the periodic flourishing of legal literature in the sixth, ninth/tenth and fourteenth centuries, Tantalos conveys the formal diversity and highly ramified transmission of epitomes (or epitomes of epitomes), which he closely connects to differing categories of legal enactment, varying needs of students and/or practitioners of law, the educational level of epitomators, and even the availability and circulation of particular manuscripts of a source-text. Tantalos addresses the manifold functions of legal epitomes, beyond explicit prefatorial statements, inasmuch as they not only served as interpretative tools in teaching/studying and practising law, but also, in many cases, replaced the original legal text and/or were themselves variously incorporated into codifications and compendia.

The last three chapters focus on particular epitomes, each illustrating different modes of engagement with classical authors. Chrysanthos Chrysanthou examines a tenth-/eleventh-century *Epitome* of Athenaios' *Deipnosophistae*, a late second-century assemblage of literary quotes framed as erudite table-talk. Although critical of its seemingly haphazard and often drastic abridgement, editors have long studied the *Epitome* as an indirect textual tradition to material missing from the partly mutilated unique witness to the unabridged version: Venice, BNM, gr. Z. 447. Taking book 13 as an analytical sample, Chrysanthou meticulously investigates the epitomator's summarizing and excerptive techniques, which, by stripping away Athenaios' sympotic setting, dialogic-narrative voice and performative erudition, reduces his text to a series of decontextualized passages, often truncating, paraphrasing or omitting quotations and curtailing source-references. Chrysanthou's remarks on lexical and syntactical modifications should be of interest to scholars of Medieval Greek. Although aspects of compositional motivation and utility remain hard to fathom, Chrysanthou's analysis elucidates facets of the epitomator's method and plausibly infers a basic intention to condense to bare essentials, at the expense of unity and coherence, transforming each book of the *Deipnosophistae* into a catalogue-like "'virtual library'" (pp. 192–193) of concise extracts on specific learned themes, potentially for use in rhetorical instruction or as a convenient repository of quotations.

In a well-written and insightful study, Marion Kruse develops his recent reappraisal of Xiphilinos' *Epitome* of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, a compo-

sition that has tended to fall into the disciplinary gap between Romanists and Byzantinists.[9] While classical scholars routinely treat the *Epitome* as an inferior and lacunose but essentially faithful indirect witness to Dio's text, in which the epitomator's omissions pose the main interpretative challenge, Kruse's re-evaluation of its coherence, intentionality and contemporary relevance calls for a new approach. In particular, by comparative analysis of the *Epitome* and otherwise extant books of Dio, Kruse argues that Xiphilinos purposefully reshaped the *Roman History*, through selectivity, transposition and editorializing interventions, with the aim of accentuating parallels between the distant past and eleventh-century present, thus crafting a stereoscopic historical vision of immense depth and pursuing a stated goal of offering ethical and political lessons to latter-day Romans. Kruse partly reprises analogies he previously drew between Xiphilinos' presentation of the late Republic, the starting point of the *Epitome*, and current military-political turmoil, whereby Roman defeat at Carrhae in 53 BC and subsequent civil wars foreshadow disaster at Manzikert in 1071 and its aftermath. Further exploration of authorial agency and milieu shows how Xiphilinos overtly challenges and quietly nuances Dio's views on, for example, the motives of Caesar's assassins and Augustus' constitutional settlement, and, by extension, the relative merits of democracy/republic and monarchy – or justice and advantage – within an intellectual climate marked by pervasive notions of imperial decline and heightened consciousness of Roman identity. Insofar as Xiphilinos' agenda verifiably affects the content and narration of episodes of Dio's *Roman History* independently transmitted via other textual traditions, Kruse's analysis has important implications for the study of those books for which the *Epitome* is the main or sole witness.

Finally, turning our gaze towards the intellectual centre of Mystras in the 1440s, Jeffrey Beneker re-appraises two conjoined opuscula by George Gemistos Plethon, preserved in a single autograph manuscript, Venice, BNM, gr. Z. 406, which treat ancient Greek history from the inconclusive battle of Mantineia to the death of Philip II of Macedon (362–336 BC). Ev-

9 See M. Kruse: Xiphilinos' Agency in the *Epitome* of Cassius Dio. In: GRBS 61, 2021, pp. 193–223, which explicitly builds on C. T. Mallan: The Style, Method, and Programme of Xiphilinus' *Epitome* of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*. In: GRBS 53, 2013, pp. 610–644. A similar line of argument underlies e. g. K. Juntunen: The Image of Cleopatra in Ioannes Xiphilinos' *Epitome* of Cassius Dio: A Reflection of the Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa? In: Acta Byzantina Fennica (N.S.) 4, 2015, pp. 123–151.

idently conceived as an extension of Xenophon's *Hellenica*, Plethon's historical narrative explicitly draws on Diodoros' *Bibliotheca* (15–16) and Plutarch's *Lives*, occasionally supplemented by uncited sources, notably Plato's *Epistles*. In the absence of a programmatic statement, previous studies have variously located this work in Plethon's scholarly and teaching activities, but commonly perceive little beyond an assemblage of excerpts or summary notes. Adducing aspects of structure and content, Beneker perceives a novel reworking of ancient materials that, in conscious response to Xenophon's concluding invitation (7.5.27), takes up the baton of narrating subsequent events to a more decisive watershed, while an increasingly biographical focus on Philip effectively fashions a *Life* of a crucial figure excluded from Plutarch's project. In such a scenario of historiographical "closure" (p. 235), eighteen centuries on, Plethon's epitomizing technique can testify to creative engagement with classical texts.

All the chapters in this volume exhibit expertise and fresh insights. Mallan deserves particular credit for integrating these contributions into current scholarship and engaging with a large subject to a level beyond the usual editorial duties of introduction and abstracts. The definition and terminology of epitomizing may continue to niggle. Even so, if the texts examined in these studies do not all equally, wholly or precisely fit specified criteria, recognition of extensive diversity in form, function and milieu is evidently preferable; indeed, the more tightly one seeks to delimit 'epitome', whether as product or process, the more a viable conception seems to slip from one's grasp. More generally, Byzantine literary scholarship has not reached a point where it can comprehensively explain why epitomes accumulate in certain subjects or genres (or periods), while in others, for instance historiography, hagiography, mythography and military science, epitomizing is relatively rare, and paraphrase and/or metaphrasis are preferred adaptative techniques. Criticisms of this book are slight and largely inconsequential. Misprints are rare[10], errors few and minor.[11] While contributors are understandably inclined to analyse their chosen genre or work in terms of particular

10 P. 4 "Matriensis" > Matritensis; p. 27: "Alexandira" > Alexandria; p. 28: "Artemiorus" > Artemidorus; p. 30: "sprit" > spirit; p. 55: "πτοαμῶν" > ποταμῶν; p. 161: "Gangras" > Gangra; p. 203: Andréas > András; p. 205 n. 44: "Pompey's death in 58 B.C." > 48 BC; p. 222 n. 5: "Θεόδωορον" > Θεόδωρον.

11 Some chapters (e.g. pp. 9, 14–15, 57, 171) cite codices as "Marcianus gr." (or just "Marcianus") when Marcianus gr. Z. is meant (gr. and gr. Z. are different series). P. 9 n. 31: "Kamariotes [...] preserved in an unedited MS from Salamanca (*UB Sala-*

compositional considerations, and a generally more positive view of epitomes/epitomizing is an important achievement of this project, we may sometimes lose sight of the mundane materiality of contemporary book culture (noted by Mallan pp. 6–7): the expense of producing copies of lengthy unabridged texts, especially in uncial (pre-c. 800), and the basic utility of a smaller format, whether scroll or codex. Further chapters might have extended inquiry to other fields, but the volume is not obviously deficient by their absence. Mallan's brief review of a rich and largely unexploited tradition of epitomizing rhetorical manuals is instructive and partly plugs a gap in the coverage (pp. 8–10). Some other possibilities could have explored genre-specific peculiarities, such as geographical writing, where abridgement can transform a cartographic coordinate system into summary description. Looking to the future, Mallan (pp. 15–16) identifies several avenues of inquiry: integration of research on rewriting Christian and non-Christian texts, in light of restrictions imposed by scriptural integrity; comparative analysis of Greek and Latin epitomizing traditions; Greek epitomes transmitted (or Greek texts epitomized) in Arabic and Syriac; and Renaissance reception. His remarks on the desirability of more critical editions of epitomes, whether currently unedited, partly edited or available only in defective older editions, are consistent with a general tendency in Byzantine literary studies to treat successive recensions or "rewritings" of texts as distinct works of intrinsic interest and not merely repositories of variant readings to be selectively registered in an apparatus criticus. This volume is bound to play a part in promoting these new approaches and perspectives.

manca (M 285)): Hunger 1978, 1.88 n. 93" (repeated p. 10 n. 38); cited Hunger ("Umfangreicher und noch unediert scheint [...]") amplified a misunderstanding of older scholarship: in fact, the text in Salm. 285 is no more extensive than that transmitted in multiple other witnesses (listed at https://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/oeuvre/6221/) and in this regard has no special editorial significance; see T. Martínez Manzano: Historia del fondo manuscrito griego de la Universidad de Salamanca. Salamanca 2015, pp. 146–148 (n. 135). P. 18 cited Mansfield/Ruina 1997 omitted from bibliography; likewise at p. 54 cited Kazanskaya 2020. P. 57: "*Marcianus gr.* 150 [...] and 151" should read 450 and 451. P. 161: "the manuscript no. 716 of the Bodleian Library" is more correctly referenced as Laud. gr. 91 (= RHBR Nr. 149), which, in any case, is merely a post-Byzantine copy of Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana M 68 sup. (gr. 524) (= RHBR Nr. 122). P. 202: "[...] confirmed by the appearance of quotes from Dio in Photios' *Lexicon*": strictly, these citations do not evince Photios' particular interest or initiative, but were all mechanically reproduced from his primary lexical source, a version of the *Synagoge* (ed. I. C. Cunningham, Berlin/New York 2003 [Sammlung griechischer und lateinischer Grammatiker 10]).

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