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11
SOME ARCHAIC GORGONS

IN THE

BRITISH MUSEUM

BY

J. SIX

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SOME ARCHAIC GORGONS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

[PLS. LIX. AND D.]

AMONGST the numerous Gorgon heads, dispersed through the different rooms of the British Museum, and unknown to me when I wrote my essay on the history of this type,¹ there are several which deserve to be published and thus made known more generally to archaeologists than they could be by exhibition even in a Museum so justly celebrated and so well arranged. It is not the object, however, of this paper to give a supplement to the cumbrous catalogue I have published, as the interest in many an instance would be but small, and to most readers of this *Journal* none whatever; but I will try to give so much of the results of my researches as may exhibit the value of those monuments to which I wish to draw attention, as these in some cases fill up a gap, and in others raise points of interest and even sometimes seem to confirm some of my suggestions.

Generally speaking the evidence drawn from the classic authors as to the types of Gorgon they were in the habit of seeing is confirmed by the monuments, but on the whole these are more fitted to explain the authors than the authors to explain them. For instance, the scheme of the Gorgon head on a small ægis woven in the swaddling clothes of the infant Ion, as described by Euripides,² would hardly be as clear to us

¹ J. Six, *Specimen literarium inaugurale de Gorgone*. Amstelodami, 1885.

² *Ion*, v. 1421:—

Γοργῶν μὲν ἐν μέσοισιν ἡτρίοις πέπλων·
v. 1423:—

κεκρασπέδωται τ' ὕφεσιν αἰγίδος τρόπον.



as it is, but that we find the device coming into use about the same time on a small gold coin of Syracuse,¹ and perhaps on the shield of the Parthenos herself, where it seems to have taken in 399-8, B.C. the place of the golden gorgoneion stolen some years before.²

Of course we must be careful to explain Pindar and Aeschylus from the monuments which date from their age, and not, as Levezow, *e.g.*, in his otherwise valuable paper on this subject³ has done, compare with a passage such as that of Pindar in the Xth Pythian ode, v. 16, a type which only arose at least a hundred years later. Nevertheless, we may sometimes gain valuable knowledge from a comparison between author and monuments. It has been shown for instance by Prof. Loeschke that the pseudo-Hesiodic description of the shield of Heracles corresponds to the art of the end of the seventh century; and if in regard to the myth of Perseus and the Gorgon the *cylia* published in this *Journal*⁴ by Mr. Cecil Smith is in some respects the best illustration of the pseudo-Hesiodic text, though it can hardly be assigned to so early a date, this may be owing to our lack of material rather than to any other cause, as we have sufficient points of comparison in other respects in a work of earlier date.⁵

But the most interesting statements for the history of our subject may be derived from pseudo-Hesiod and Homer, who both seem to point to Cyprus as the place whence the Greeks learned the Gorgon. I cannot here repeat the argument at length, but it will perhaps suffice to observe that the first mention Homer makes of this monster is in describing the shield of Agamemnon,⁶ evidently a piece of Cyprian workmanship, and that in the lengthy description of the Shield of Heracles,⁷ as in later mythographies, the bag destined to hold the head of Medusa is called by a foreign word, *cibisis*, which, as Hesychius informs us, was Cyprian. Nor is this supposition in contradiction with Hesiod, whose genealogy points to the south of Asia Minor, and whose mention of the birth of

¹ *Num. Chron.* N.S. xiv. pl. iii. 10.

² *De Gorgone*, p. 62, iv. 3 b.

³ Levezow, *Ueber die Entwicklung des Gorgonen-Ideals. Abhand. d. Berliner Acad.* 1832.

⁴ 1884, pl. xliii.

⁵ A black-figured *lebes* in the Louvre. *Catalogue Campana*, ii. 25; *de Gorgone*, ii. 1 c.

⁶ *Il.* xi. v. 36.

⁷ v. 216-236.

Pegasus and Chrysaor¹ finds its oldest illustration on a Cyprian sarcophagus.²

The monuments at least do not gainsay these statements, as the earlier fictile works of Greece, the Mycenæan pottery and the Dipylon vases, and even the geometrical vases bear no Gorgon, and the oldest representations which have come to my knowledge, though not found in Cyprus—whence I know none older than the middle of the sixth century—came from the islands on the way from Cyprus to the Peloponnesus and from the Peloponnesus itself, from Rhodes (?),³ Melos⁴ and Sparta.⁵

And this might have been expected, since the Cyprians, being, as we know from their dialect, Arcadians, the intercourse with the Peloponnesus must have been in early times more frequent than with other regions; nor can we wonder at finding that among Greek towns an Arcadian town alone, Tegea, preserved a myth connected with the story of Perseus and Medusa, though independent of the regular and rather sober myth.

That in Cyprus also a version differing from the received one was known is shown by the sarcophagus already mentioned—though we cannot ascertain its details. We may safely assume that wherever the flood of material is most copious we are nearest to the source, and it is for this reason that I am happy to introduce to archaeologists, in plate LIX. another specimen of high antiquity found in Rhodes which presents an entirely new form of the myth, though the head of the Gorgon does not differ widely from known types. My attention was kindly directed to it by Prof. Loeschke. As the present paper owes its origin to the wish of having this interesting type published, we shall have to consider it somewhat more closely than others, and if we do not, as I fear, succeed entirely in explaining its meaning, we can at least ascertain its place in the series of earliest types.

We will not therefore treat of the Melian and Spartan Gorgons already mentioned as they both represent, as a glance at engravings of them will show better than words, different

¹ *Theog.* v. 281.

² *Revue Archéologique*, 1875, pl. ii.
Cesnola-Stern, *Cyperm.* pl. xviii.

³ *De Gorgone*, iii. 1 a, p. 8.

⁴ Conze, *Melische Thongefässe* pl. iii.

⁵ Milehhoefler, *Arch. Zeitung*, 1881,
pl. xvii. 1.

types which though very interesting in themselves, are not so widely spread as the one we have to deal with. The standard example of this class is a large bronze, which I saw two years ago in the store-house of the Louvre. It is the foot, it appears, of a tripod in the shape of a Gorgon kneeling on both knees and supporting on the crown which decks her head a lion's paw. She wears a long and close-fitting garment which helps not a little to impart an air of high antiquity to the figure. She has no wings. The head is as broad as it is high owing to the large jaws which inclose the widely opened mouth, armed with many teeth, which do not however as yet protrude. The tongue, which is hardly ever wanting, seems to be worn away. The nose is short and the top divided in three nearly equal circular parts. The large and widely opened eyes were set with precious stones or filled with paint. The forehead is surrounded by short curls, but the rest of the hair falls down in long tresses. On those curls rests the crown. This large bronze was found in the Archipelago, or perhaps in Rhodes.

On our plate we find most in accordance with this description the shape of the head, the inorganic ornamental shape of the nose and the crown which decks the head, here however underneath the hair, which does not fall down in tresses but in loose locks, as on the coins of Populonia, and already surrounds the head as a sort of beard or mane. The tongue is thrust out but small. To a row of small teeth are added at each side a single boar's tusk. The chin is ornamented in the same way as the nose. The ears are very large. This Gorgon belongs to the small class which wear a long chiton, and moreover has four curved wings, a combination somewhat better known to later times but always rare. Her garment, open at the left side, leaves bare the left leg, which, by the by, has a right foot, and falling down in front over a broad girdle, seems to be nothing else but a Doric chiton. The Gorgon holds with each hand by the neck a swan, the feet of which rest on her leg or dress. This scheme fills up the whole of the plate, leaving only here and there room for small ornaments which even cover the bare arms and leg of the Gorgon and the wings of the swans. These, and still more the design of the border, are the last remnants of the wickerwork patterns which had so large a share in the ornamentation of the older Rhodian plates and dishes, and

suggested those rays issuing from the centre and filling up half the circular field, which give so peculiar a character to Rhodian ware. There is another indication, as Mr. Cecil Smith observed to me, confirming the view that this plate is one of the latest of its type, namely, the use of engraved lines and outlines in the figures of the swans and in the folds of the chiton and the ornaments of the girdle, which though very rude seem to be the first attempts towards those beautiful engravings which we admire in the black figured vases of the best Attic style. The painting is of a bright reddish colour and the material the usual yellow earthenware formed by the potter's wheel, as may be detected on examining the plate. In the ridge running around the bottom of the plate are, as usual, two holes which appear to have been made before baking. I should not however like to conclude thence that these plates were made solely to adorn a tomb, as the ancient Rhodians may as well have used their plates and dishes for the adornment of their abodes as other peoples in more recent times, and as we know the Greeks to have done with their drinking cups.

But coming back to our theme we still have to find out the meaning of this Gorgonic figure holding in each hand a swan, and as there is no myth of the Gorgon which mentions anything of the kind, we have either to seek another name for this goddess, or to accept a not altogether impossible interpretation. I have in a similar case, the Gorgonic figure holding two lions by the throat on a fragment of a bronze chariot found at Perugia, tried the first method, venturing, not however without many doubts, to explain it as *Kήρ*,¹ but though I still hold that other daemons besides the Gorgon must have had the same aspect, and that some barbaric peoples may have venerated more deities of the kind than the Greeks adopted from them, I do not see that this could help us much in explaining the present type.

On the contrary all the ancient poets and mythographers tell us that the Gorgons dwelt near the ocean, whether on a mythical island or on the shore, either on this side, or across in the land of utter darkness. And just as I think it is now generally assumed that the deer and the beasts of prey in the hands of the so-called Persian Artemis have hardly any other

¹ *De Gorgone*, p. 82.

meaning save to symbolize her dwelling in the mountains, so it seems this Gorgon is localised by the swans as living on the banks of the ocean. It would hardly be worth while to cite any authority for so well-known a fact, as that these banks were thought of as frequented by swans, were it not that the following lines from the *Shield of Heracles* (v. 314)

ἀμφὶ δ' ἴτυν ῥέειν Ὀκεανὸς πλήθοντι εἰοκῶς·
 πᾶν δὲ συνεῖχε σάκος πολυδαίδαλον· οἱ δὲ κατ' αὐτὸν
 κύκνοι ἀερσιπότηαι μεγάλ' ἤπυον, οἳ ρά τε πολλοὶ
 νῆχον ἐπ' ἄκρον ὕδωρ, πὰρ δ' ἰχθύες ἐκλονέοντο.

explained at the same time as emblematic of the ocean those long rows of swans or other aquatic birds on many ancient vases and thus taught us how this combination of ideas might be familiar to the artist's mind.

It is curious that this Gorgon in so uncommon a scheme finds its nearest analogy as to her type of head in the not less rare male Gorgonic figure found at Orvieto,¹ which still remains unexplained, but has a pronounced Asiatic character.

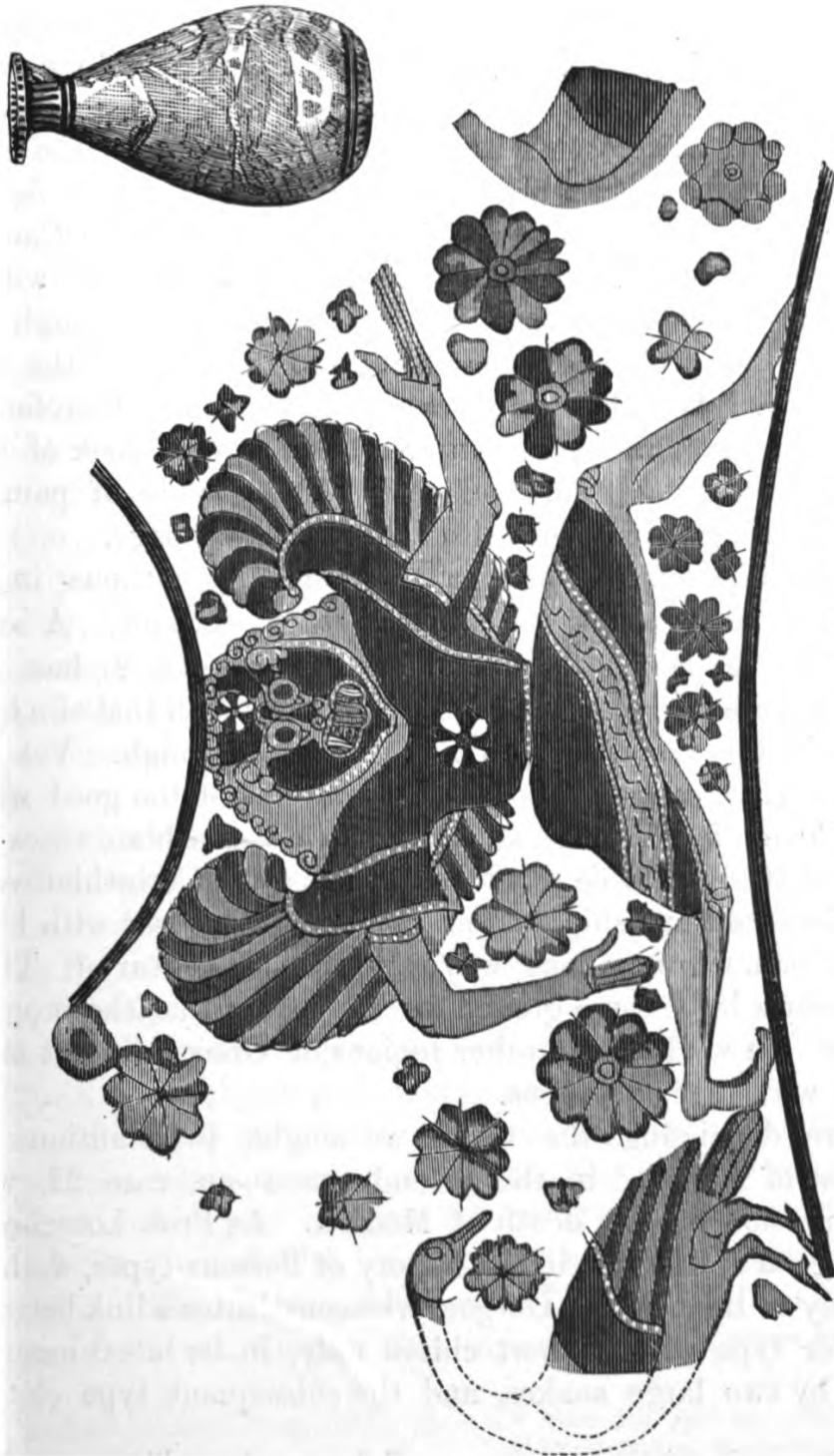
Another example of this same type of head is presented by a small aryballos in the first vase-room (case 58) of the British Museum, made in the shape of a Gorgon's head and neck: this type, though not of so great antiquity as I had supposed before seeing it, is nevertheless interesting from its close similarity to another example now at Vienna.² The Viennese specimen was found at Kilo near Budrun, that of the British Museum at Vulci in Italy; facts worthy of note considering the rarity and early date of these vases.

On the whole this type of Gorgon has been most widely spread on archaic vases, Corinthian, Cyrenaic (?) and Attic, with black figures, which as a rule present the same type with slight variation, which gradually deteriorates till it hardly bears any resemblance whatever to a human head.

I will not repeat here the history of this whole class, but I must point out a few Corinthian specimens new to me. In my previous work when pointing out the foreign origin of the Gorgon and its absence from earlier Greek art, I added to the

¹ *Archäologische Zeitung*, 1877, taf. ix. 1.

² *De Gorgone*, t. i. iii, 1 b.



ALABASTOS FROM CAMIROS : HALF SCALE.

above-mentioned vases the Corinthian pottery of so-called Asiatic type. Now, however, the British Museum yields some interesting examples of this class. The first vase-room (case *B*) contains two large dishes, Nos. 15 and 16, bearing in the middle a large Gorgoneion of the usual Corinthian type¹ surrounded by wild beasts and sphinxes, or sirens, intermixed with flowers. The ornamentation of the outside is the same in both, but in No. 16 already mixed up with human figures. The same room has in case 57 an alabastos found at Camiros of the same style, decorated on a field of flowers with a swan and in front of it a flying Gorgon, who, though the peculiar shape of her head may be due to the shape of the vase, and all attempts to bring it to a certain class may therefore be useless, still remains of real interest owing to its look of high antiquity resulting from the very antique mode of painting and decorating. It is figured on the preceding page.

It is not perhaps unnecessary to be very cautious in our judgments, as we may see from another example. A small vase in the shape of a foot (second vase-room, case 2), has on a square handle a Gorgon head nearly identical with that of a large *crater*² in the Louvre which looks ancient enough. Yet this foot, though I cannot fix exactly its date, is of too good workmanship and finish to be as early as the Corinthian vases are generally thought to be. But might not some Corinthian vases of careless workmanship, just as the last Attic vases with black figures,³ come down a long way into the fifth century? There really seems to be some ground for supposing that the progress in art of the workmen in other regions of Greece did not move abreast with that at Athens.

Before dismissing the vases we ought to mention the *Oenochoe* of Amasis,⁴ in the second vase-room, case 22, with representation of the death of Medusa. As Prof. Loeschcke⁵ has assigned it its place in the history of Perseus-types, we have here only to treat of the Gorgon, who constitutes a link between the older type with a short chiton only, in its latest example girded by two large snakes, and the subsequent type clothed

¹ *De Gorgone*, iii. 3 b.

² *De Gorgone*, p. 9, t. i. iii. 2 b; *Cat. Campana*, iv. 84.

³ I am not speaking now of the Panathenaic Amphorae.

⁴ Klein, *Meistersignaturen*, 4.

⁵ *Archäologische Zeitung*, 1881, p. 31.

with an animal's hide, and whose type of head is midway between that usual on the vases and that other type not less widely spread on Asiatic and Cyprian coins and Sicilian terracottas, which is best represented by the Medusa of the Selinus metope. That we should find just here a closer resemblance to that most widely spread family in a representation of the same subject, Perseus killing Medusa, might be fortuitous, as another Gorgoneion from the hand of Amasis, lately published,¹ shows exactly the same type, and at least one of those we have from Exekias² seems to be very like, but it remains nevertheless curious that, as Prof. Loeschcke has observed, both monuments seem to point to a common origin of their subject by the beardlessness of Perseus, by no means common in those early times. Amasis has adorned both Gorgon heads with large snakes, known already from a large *lebes*³ with black figures in the Louvre, the François vase⁴ and others, and which from very early times, though never exclusively, surround this head in the art of Greece proper and the Asiatic colonies, but are nearly unknown in Sicily. It is difficult to settle this point in respect to the Etruscan Gorgon as long as the Greek or Italian origin remains doubtful in the case of so many objects found in Italy.

It is this same consideration which induces me to linger for a few moments over a pair of bronze greaves found at Ruvo, bequeathed together with a cuirass and triple-crested helmet to the British Museum by Sir William Temple (second bronze-room, case 2). These greaves are decorated at the knee with an embossed running Gorgon, holding with both hands a snake, clad in a short chiton and winged shoes indicated by engraved lines. The head and hair, excepting the crown, and the beard are of the same type as those on a piece of bronze horse armour⁵ and a pair of greaves⁶ brought also from Southern Italy by Maler, and with his collection acquired by the Karlsruhe Museum. The likeness is enhanced by the use of ivory for the tongue and teeth, the fact that in both the eyes were originally

¹ *Archäologische Zeitung*, 1884, taf. li. B.

² *Mon. dell' Inst.* ii. 1853, t. xxii.

³ *De Gorgone*, p. 8, t. i. iii. 1 c; *Cat. Campana*, ii. 25.

⁴ *Mon. dell' Inst.* iv. t. 54—58.

⁵ *Die Gros:herz. Badische Alterthümer Sammlung zu Karlsruhe*, iii. taf. 18; *de Gorgone*, p. 21, t. ii. iii. 6 d.

⁶ *De Gorgone*, p. 21, t. ii. iii. 6 e.

set with gems or filled in with paint, by the same combination of embossed work with engraved lines, and the erect entwined snakes along the sides of the greaves. As many of these peculiarities together with a general likeness are found also on some armour from the Crimea,¹ with a Gorgoneion at the elbow, no doubt remains but that the source whence these arms originate was situated somewhere in Greece proper; and as the Gorgoneia, specially the larger ones, show a great likeness to the coins of the latter half of the sixth century attributed either to Athens or to Eretria, it seems probable that this armour dates from the same time and the same region, where if we seek for a renowned factory of armour we shall find Chalcis in the highest repute, and Euboea in the most favourable condition to spread its wares to east and west. Whether the greave copied by Weiss² from Rochstuhl, *Musée de rares et anciennes armes*, is of the same fabric I am not able to decide. It looks somewhat later. The greaves worn by Menelaus on a vase of Hieron, painted by Macron,³ seem to be of the same type though later.

It would be hardly less interesting to know whence comes the handle of a large flat and circular or oval object from the Payne-Knight collection. (Pl. D.) If it is, as I suppose, Etruscan, we must of course despair of explaining its meaning. Yet it seems worth describing. The real handle, on each side of which is a Triton, bears in relief two Gorgons bending forward in consequence of the shape of the handle, and sustaining each other by the elbow with outstretched hand. The knees are slightly bent, and the wings folded, which gives a very peculiar look to this strange composition. The heads are, of course, seen *de face*, but not upright. They belong to the same type as those already mentioned, but are much later. The figures are clad in a short folded garment, and wear shoes with large wings. The space between the heads is decorated by a rosette. I dare not even guess what the meaning of all this may be, and should not like to follow those who find a family connection between Iris and Medusa, and might perhaps explain this as a symbolic picture of the rainbow resting on the waters. It will be best to accept it for the moment as merely decorative.

Etruria, I suppose, afforded another curious object, a carne-

¹ *Antiquités du Bospore Cimmérien*,
pl. xxviii. 7.

² *Kostümkunde*, ii. fig. 280.

³ *Gazette Archéologique*, 1880, t. 7, 8.

lian, cut more or less in the shape of a scarab, completely covered by four outstretched wings, on which is a Gorgon head and neck of good work (No. 1),¹ which finds its nearest analogues in real Etruscan examples, and may be best dated by comparison of a terra-cotta acroterion from Mont' Alcino, now at Leyden,² which is evidently older, and a golden fragment of a four-winged head,³ or an engraving on a mirror⁴ both of later Etruscan art. But the shape of the mouth comes nearest to that on a small silver coin from Asia Minor, which on one side has a Gorgon head surrounded by four wings also, though not disposed in the same way, and on the reverse a four-winged Harpy to right in an incuse square,⁵ which coin may, I think, be attributed to Cilicia, perhaps to Mallus.⁶



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2.

ETRUSCAN GEMS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

The stone therefore would seem to point to a closer connection than I dared accept before, between the four-winged Asiatic Gorgon and the later Etruscan head with beautiful features;⁷ on it the wings are disposed much in the same way as those of the Seraphim of Christian art. The second gem engraved, also from the British Museum, occupies a place in the same line of descent.

It is a real pity that we know no older representations of the Seraph than those of Christian times, as there would be many points of comparison between Gorgon and Seraph in

¹ The woodcut is not altogether successful, and represents the general scheme of the gem better than details, such as chin and mouth.

² Janssen, *Terracotten te Leyden*, ii. 7; *de Gorgone*, tab. ii. iii. 8 a.

³ Micali, *Storia d. ant. Pop.* tav.

li. 5.

⁴ Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, cxxi.

⁵ Von Prokesch-Osten, *Inedita*, 1854, t. iv. 7.

⁶ *De Gorgone*, p. 31, adn. 1.

⁷ Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, cccxxvii.

name, in symbols and in apotropaic use, even perhaps in origin ; but however interesting this question might be, the time seems not yet come to treat it with competence and with sufficient detail.

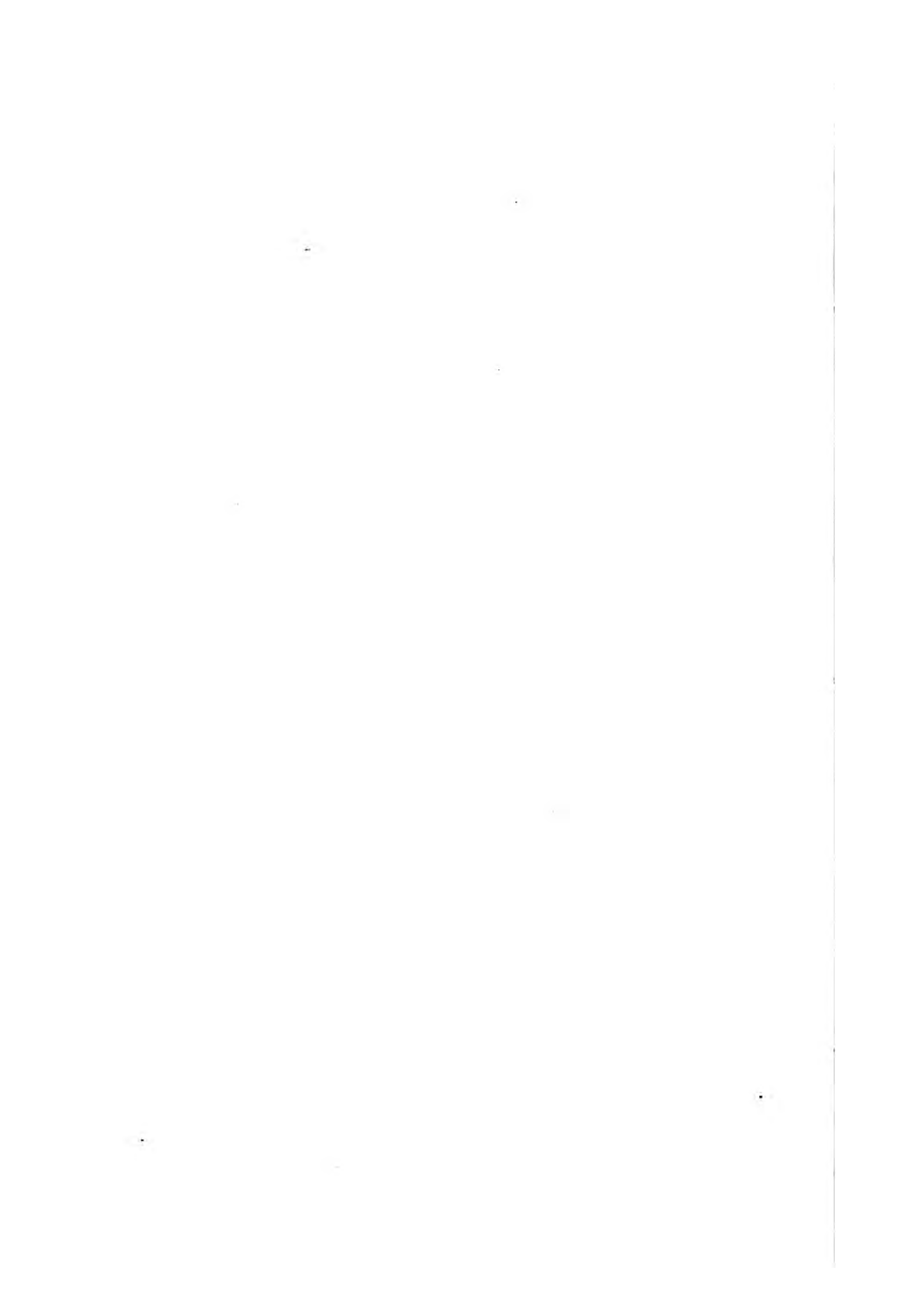
I need hardly repeat that I do not pretend to exhaust here the material supplied by the British Museum, but I must remind the reader that, as the title of this paper shows, I abstain purposely from mentioning any of the later Gorgoneia on terra-cotta, vases, or gems, in which classes of remains the Museum has still many an object well worthy of being published.

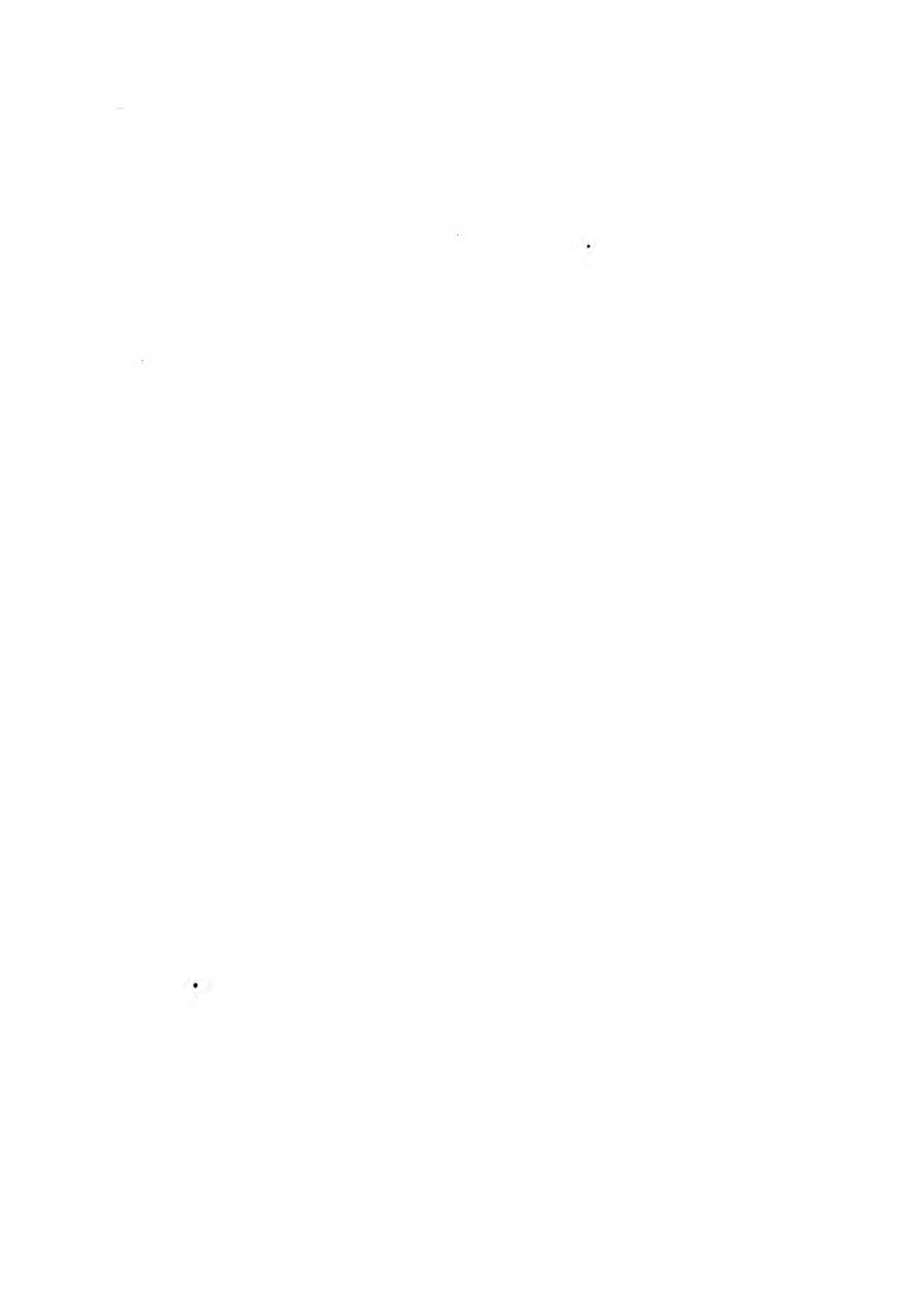
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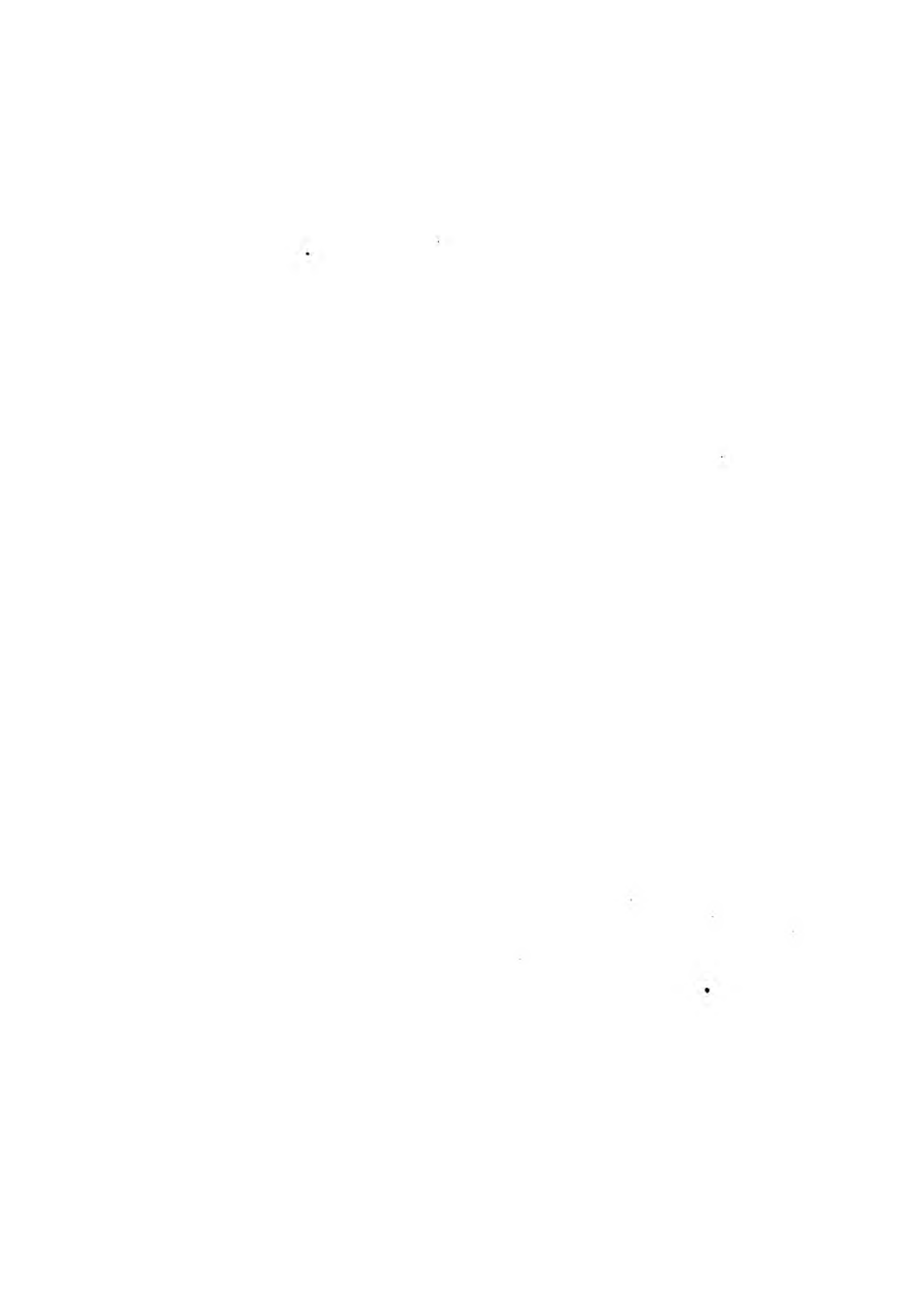
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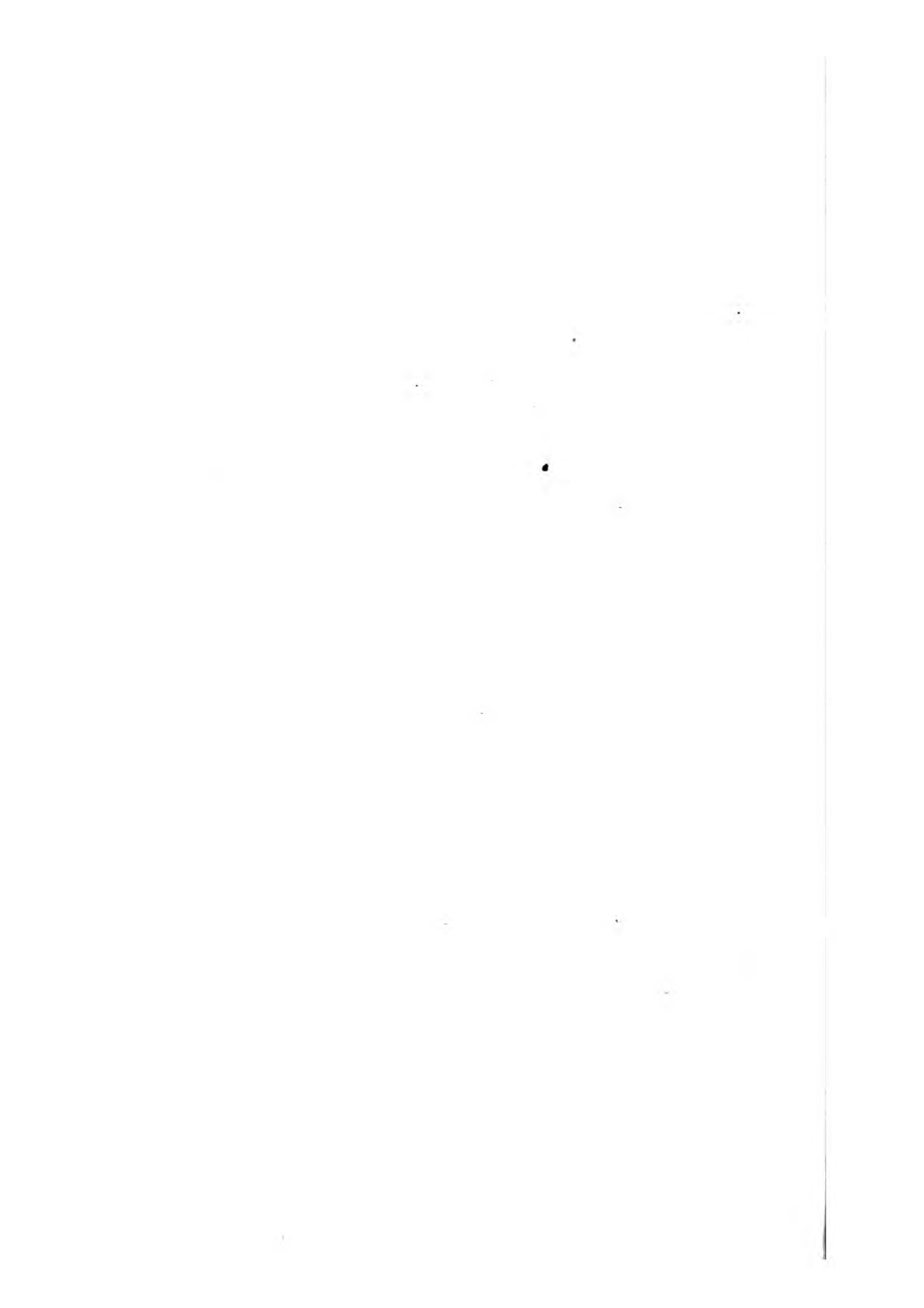


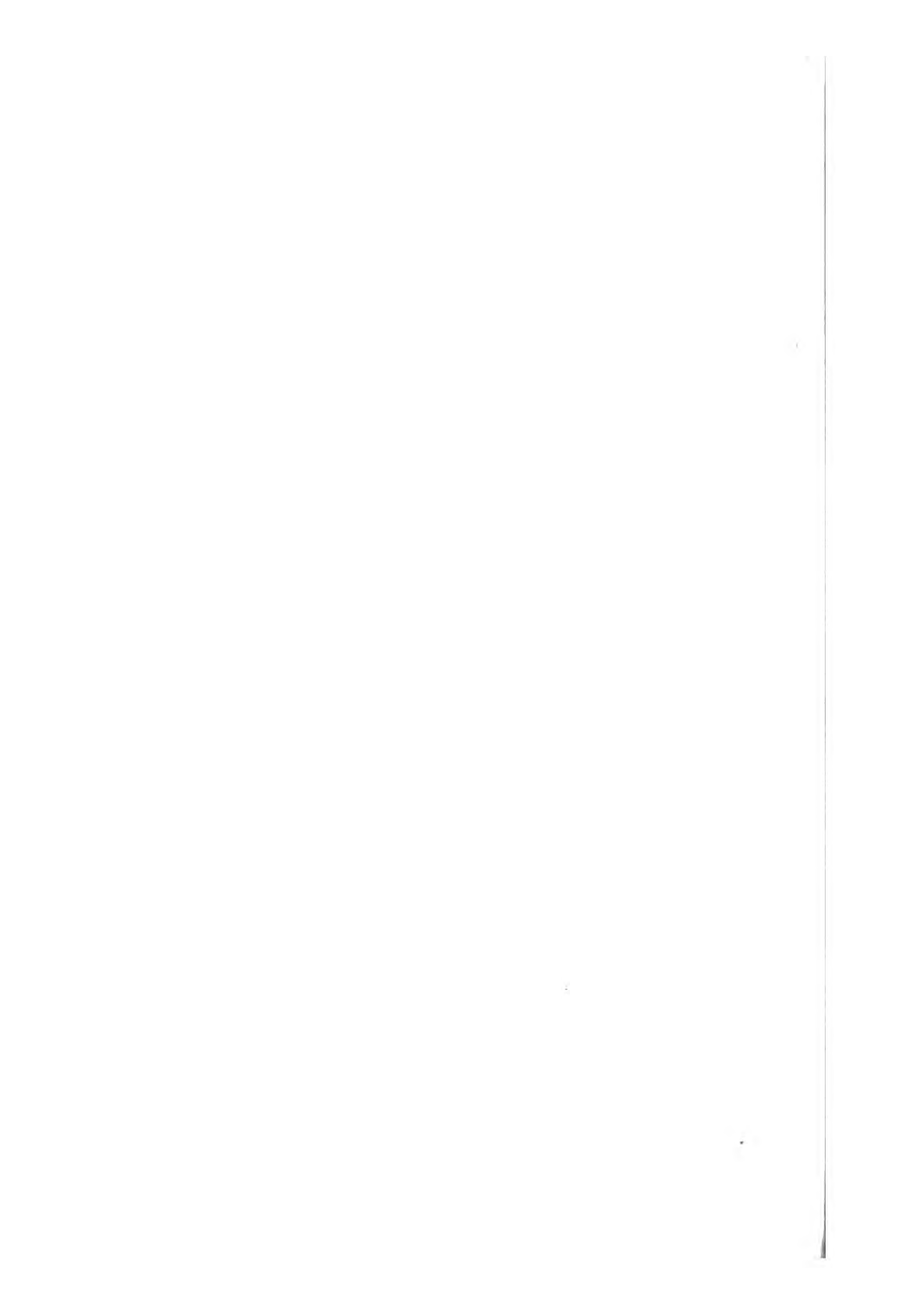






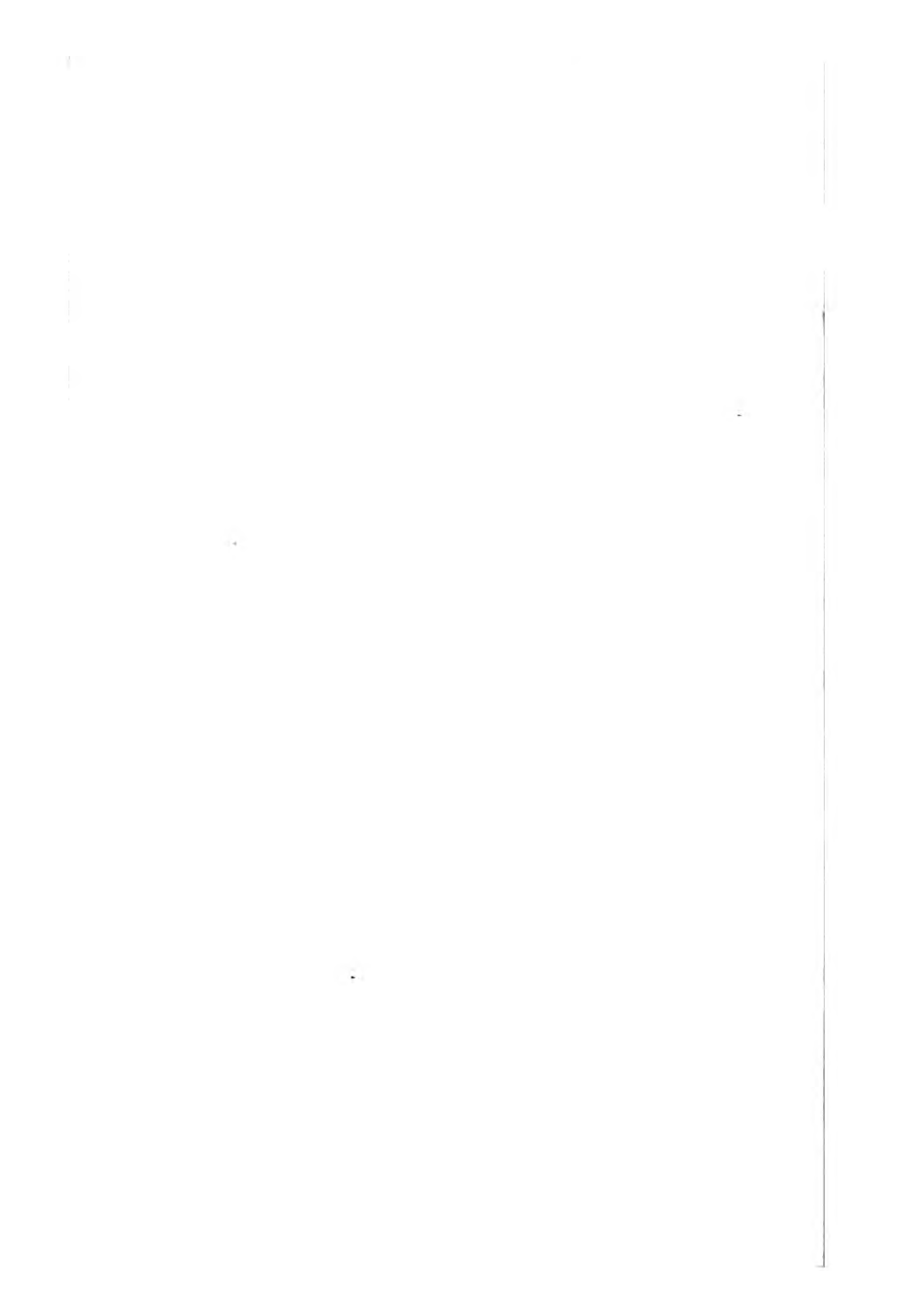












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