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*Аветисян А.С., соискатель*

*преподаватель кафедры «Управления, бизнеса и туризма»*

*Российско-Армянский Университет,*

*преподаватель научно-исследовательского центра «Туризм и сервис»*

*Ереванский Государственный Университет Языков и Социальных*

*Наук имени В.Я. Брюсова*

*Армения, г. Ереван*

## **ВЕЛИКИЙ ШЕЛКОВЫЙ ПУТЬ КАК ПЕРЕКРЕСТОК ЯЗЫКОВ И КУЛЬТУР**

*Аннотация:* Международные и межкультурные отношения стали важными не только сегодня, но и в древние времена, когда люди пересекали границы и путешествовали по рекреационной, религиозной и, конечно же, в коммерческих целях. Говоря о коммерческих отношениях, важно отметить Великий Шелковый путь, который, начиная с Китая, пересекая границы разных стран, включая Армению, добрался до Европы, став уникальным мостом среди разных языков, религий, народов, культур и цивилизаций. Есть много характеристических черт культур, и среди них одни из самых важных являются языки, так как язык – это одна из лучших призм, сквозь которую культуры могут быть восприняты.

*В этой статье рассматривается Великий Шелковый Путь с лингвистической и культурной стороны. Особый акцент поставлен на*

слова “вордан кармир” и “карпет\* (ковер)” и, следовательно, на использование особой красной краски называемой “вордан кармир” на армянском языке и на ковры, в частности, на самый древний и хорошо сохранившийся поэрыкский ковер.

**Ключевые слова:** Великий шелковый путь, перекресток культур и языков, вордан кармир, ковры, Поэрыкский ковер.

*Avetisyan A.S., PhD student*

*lecturer at the chair of «Management, business and tourism»*

*Russian-Armenian University*

*lecturer at the scientific-research center of «Tourism and Service»*

*Yerevan State University of Languages and Social Sciences after V.Brusov*

*Armenia, Yerevan*

## **THE GREAT SILK ROAD AS CROSSROADS OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES**

**Abstract:** *International and intercultural relations have become important not just nowadays, but there were like this also in ancient times, when people used to cross borders and travel on recreational, religious and, of course, on commercial purposes. When speaking about the commercial relations, it is important to mention the Great Silk Road, which, having started from China and having crossed the borders of different countries, including Armenia, reached Europe thus becoming a unique bridge among different languages, religions, nations, cultures and civilizations. There are many characteristic features of cultures, and among them one of the most important ones are*

*languages, as the language is one of best prisms through which the culture can be perceived.*

*In this article the Great Silk Road is studied from the linguistic and cultural angles in order to show the relations between different countries. The special emphasis has been put on the words “vordan karmir” and “carpet” and, consequently, on the usage of this special red dye called “vordan karmir” in Armenian and carpets, particularly the oldest best preserved carpet of the world, the Pazyryk rug.*

**Keywords:** *The Great Silk Road, crossroads of cultures and languages, “vordan karmir”, carpets, Pazyryk carpet.*

### **The Great Silk Road as Crossroads of Languages and Cultures**

People have always had different motives to travel. These motives can be recreational, cultural, scientific, commercial, and so on. Commercial motives were and continue to be among the most important ones. The Great Silk Road was an ancient system of trade routes between the East and the West. It stretched from China to Europe reaching the Mediterranean Sea and connecting with each other countries, languages, religions, cultures, civilizations and many more. This route was mainly used from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. up to the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. In the Age of Discoveries, when new sea routes had been discovered, the land routes started to lose their significance. Without stop it could take one year to travel from China to Europe though very few merchants used to do it. It was a route full of dangers and interests at the same time. The merchants were often accompanied by writers, troubadours, historians, scientists, missionaries, or just travelers, who were not just accompanying the merchants, but were learning a lot from whatever they could see at the same time giving their knowledge and experience to the countries they were visiting thus enriching both their own culture and the cultures of others.

For the first time the term “Silk Road” (in German - *Die Seidenstrasse*) was used in 1877 by the German traveler, geographer and scientist Baron Ferdinand Freiherr von Richthofen. Silk Road was neither the oldest nor the only trade route in the world. Before the Silk Road there had existed such trade routes as Lapis Lazuli Trade Routes, Amber Roads and others, but among all of them the Great Silk Road has had a special fame and interest throughout centuries, and has not lost its interest in the modern world either.

Definitely the Silk Road first served as a route for exporting Chinese silk to Western countries, but then besides silk many other different goods started to be produced, exported and imported - the road was a good opportunity for exchange of goods between many countries. However, the Silk Road was much more than just a trade route: it can be considered to be a bright model of intercultural communication where the intercultural competence was of preliminary importance.

Intercultural competence is the ability of successful communication with people of other cultures. There are a number of definitions of culture. Edward Hall states that "Culture is those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, which they communicate without knowing, and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged". Another view has been expressed by Walter Lippmann who mentions that "Culture is the name for what people are interested in, their thoughts, their models, the books they read and the speeches they hear, their table-talk, gossip, controversies, historical sense and scientific training, the values they appreciate, the quality of life they admire. All communities have a culture. It is the climate of their civilization".

Culture can also be defined as the total way of a people, composed of their learned and shared behavior patterns, values, norms and material objects.

Culture is stored in individual human beings in the form of their beliefs, attitudes, and values. Beliefs are an individual's representations of the outside world. They serve as the storage system for the content of our past experiences, including thoughts, memories, and interpretations of events. Attitudes, like beliefs, are internal events and not directly observable by other people. They are emotional responses to objects, ideas and people. Values have an evaluative component and are what people who share a culture regard strongly as good or bad<sup>1</sup>.

The Silk Road occupied thousands of kilometers and connected with each other cultures and civilizations, consequently languages and religions as well.

As Samuel P. Huntington states, “The main components of any culture and civilization are the language and religion”.

The well-known Greek historian Herodotus mentions that “Blood, language, religion, way of life: this is what was common among the Greeks and what differentiated them from the Persians and the other not-Persians”.

The similar thought is expressed by the famous Armenian writer Khachatur Abovyan in his novel called “The wounds of Armenia”: “What preserves the nation and unites one with the other are the language and faith. Change your language, deny your faith... how will you say which nation you belong to”.

On the Great Silk Road there were spoken dozens of languages among them both Indo-European and others.

The branches of the Indo-European family of languages are as follows:

- Indo-Iranian

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers, E. and Th., Steinfatt. "Intercultural Communication". page 79

- Armenian
- Baltic
- Slavic
- Greek
- Albanian
- Italic
- Germanic

As well as`

- Luwian/Hittite or Anatolian
- Tocharian,
- Thracian,
- Phrygian,
- Illyrian,
- Venetic,
- Celtic,

The first group of languages contains those languages which were widely spoken on the Silk Road. Although the second group also belongs to Indo-European family of languages, there are no records of their being spoken by the travelers of the famous Silk Road.

However, next to the above-mentioned point, one should note that besides Indo-European languages there were also other languages used on the Silk Road as:

- Japanese,
- Korean,
- Chinese-Tibetan,
- Arabic,

- Altaic,
- Austro-Asian,
- Caucasian,
- Dravidian,
- Uralic,
- Nile-Saharan

Communication among people of the same or different cultures is basically realized by the means of the language. Language is the basic means of communication which can be defined as the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs. It is one of the basic needs of human existence.

As mentioned above, dozens of languages were spoken on the Silk Road, and there appears the question – “how?” The answer of this question is that merchants should have been among the educated people of those times who could “make business”. They should have known not only calculating, buying and selling, but also all the techniques of successful management and marketing which could not have been realized without good language and communication skills. Besides, not all the merchants travelled throughout all the Silk Road. In many regions they could have had the same language of communication doing the interchange of goods near the borders of their countries. However, those merchants who travelled around many countries needed to speak at least one or more foreign languages. The more languages they could speak, the longer distances and the more borders they could cross successfully and the better traders they could be.

During the Great Silk Road not only people but also words “travelled” from country to country.

The word “Karmesin” in German means “thin clothes of red color”, “кармазинный” in Russian means “dark red”, the same root is seen in the Italian word “carminio” meaning “carmine” and so on. The root of these words, as mentions the Armenian linguist Hr. Acharyan in his “Armenian Etymological Dictionary”, is the root “kirm” - کرم in Persian, “krmi” in Sanskrit etc., and in all these languages that root means “insect”. “The historical reason of the appearing of this word is that before the red color used to be produced from the insect called “coccus ilicis” or “coccus polonicus”, writes the linguist”.<sup>2</sup>

As this article is not a linguistic one and does not aim at discovering the roots of the words, here we only try to spread light on the usage of the above-mentioned words in the framework of the Silk Road. We can suppose that during the Silk Road this word became widely used in many European languages because of the Armenian words “karmir” and “karmin” which mean “red” and “red dye of special insects” and refer to red cochineal, red insects which were mostly used for red dye of very special quality. The reason of such a hypothesis is that this red dye was one of the most important products that the Armenian merchants used to take with them to the countries they travelled to. This dye is perfect for painting miniatures, frescoes, clothes, carpets. It is not surprising that “vordan karmir” («ն ր դ ւն ի ւր զ ի ր» - in Armenian, red color of the insects) was mostly used in the carpets as this dye is resistant and steady towards light, time and other factors. Sargon II of Assyria in 714 BC when taking the southern part of Urartu Kingdom<sup>3</sup> mentions about the red

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<sup>2</sup> Հ ր . Ա ճ առ յ ւն , Հ ա յ ե ր ե ի Ս ր զ ս ս ս լ յ ւն ք ս ն ս ր յ ւն , հ ս ս ն ք 2, է ջ 558 - Hr. Acharyan, Armenian Etymological Dictionary, volume 2

<sup>3</sup> Urartu Kingdom – Urartu is the Assyrian variant of the word Ararat. The Assyrians used to call Ararat Kingdom of Armenia Urartu meanwhile the local sources have preserved the name as Ararat Kingdom or Van Kingdom. Armenia was called in different ways by different neighbors, one of the proofs of which is the Behistun inscription of the king Darius I in Iran.



clothes taken from the Khaldi<sup>4</sup> temple of the city Ardini-Musasir<sup>5</sup>. The Arabic historians when mentioning the Armenian carpets put a special emphasis on their red unfading color.

Information about the Armenian “vordan karmir” can be found in the books of many historians. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder in the 1<sup>st</sup> century mentions that the main products exported from Armenia to the international market started from “vordan karmir”. Description of this red dye can be found in the works of the Armenian historian Ghazar Parpetsi (Ghazar from Parpi, 5th century, Պարսպ Նարեկի Հայոց – “The Armenian History”), the mathematician, astronomer Anania Shirakatsi (Ananias from Shirak, 7th century, Աշխարհացունի – “Ashkharhatsuyts”<sup>6</sup>) and others. It was considered to be the nicest dye in the world and was used to paint the clothes of the kings and princes. The Armenian “vordan karmir” became the base for signatures with red ink which was the right of only kings and Kathoghikoses<sup>7</sup>. The “vordan karmir” was used also in medicine and cosmetology.

The red insects (in Latin - *Porphyrophora hamelii*) are insects which can be found in different countries but all of them have some differentiating characters. In Armenia there are three types of these insects: *Porphyrophora hamelii* (Brandt), *Porphyrophora monticola* (Borchsenius) and *Porphyrophora tritici* (Bodenheimer). Among them the first one is called native “Armenian” or “Araratian vordan karmir”, which is the biggest among all the three, is endemic and still can be found in Ararat valley of Armenia.

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<sup>4</sup> Khaldi – the supreme god of the Urartian pantheon

<sup>5</sup> Ardini-Musasir – the religious center of Urartu Kingdom, located in the south of the capital city Van

<sup>6</sup> Ashkharhatsuyts – Ashkharhatsuyts is often translated as “Geography”

<sup>7</sup> Katoghikos – the head of the Armenian clergy, the supreme patriarch

The Armenian “vordan karmir” is the biggest among those which can be used for the production of the dye. The females do not have wings. Their length is from 4 to 12 mm. The males have wings. The length of the body of the males is 2-3 mm. For the red dye the females are used, as the males are smaller, it is difficult to collect them and the red dye in them is little. The red color is 2-5 % of the weight of the insect. Almost all their life the insects live inside the soil. They live on the roots of aeluropus<sup>8</sup> or cane. They come out to the surface of the earth in the early morning (from 6 to 10/11 a.m.) of September-October for 35-40 days, only for fecundation. This is when they were collected for the dye production. According to Armenian historical sources, they were spread in the middle part of the basin of the river Araks (Արարատ – in Armenian, also called Aras or Araxes), mostly in Ararat valley as well as near lake Urmia (Ուրմիա – in Armenian, one of the three great lakes of the Armenian Highland - Great Armenia, nowadays in Iran) and in the region of Erzurum (Էրզրում , Չարինի – in Armenian, also called Karin, a city in Bardzr Hayk province of Armenian Highland – Great Armenia, nowadays in Turkey).<sup>9 10</sup>. From 1 hectare it is possible to collect 25-30 kilogrammes of insects.

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<sup>8</sup> Aeluropus (նրդախնու in Armenian) – the Armenian name of this plant is translated as “the herb of the insects”

<sup>9</sup> Note 1: The Republic of Armenia of nowadays is only the north-western part of the geographical unit called “Armenian Highland” or “Armenian Plateau” which was politically the historical Mets Hayk, Major Hayk or Great Armenia, where throughout all the Armenian history, in different historical periods there have been different Armenian kingdoms and states. So, as today's Republic of Armenia only 1/10<sup>th</sup> part of Mets Hayk – Great Armenia, quite many of the Armenian cities, which were on the Silk Road, are not in the actual territory of Armenia, that is why in brackets there actual names and locations are also mentioned.

<sup>10</sup> Note 2: The historical names of ancient Armenian cities, regions, geographical units are mentioned as their Armenian names are. Next to the Armenian variants in the brackets the international variants are mentioned, too.

There were painting houses of “vordan karmir” in medieval Artashat and Dvin which were among 13 capital cities of Armenia<sup>11</sup>.

The most famous ones are the Armenian, Mexican and Polish cochineals.

Since the 13<sup>th</sup> century the export of the Armenian “vordan karmir” decreased and then stopped. There were two reasons of it. First, little by little the Mexican cochineal entered the market and already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had its firm place in the international market. Although it was of lower quality compared to the Armenian one, but was much cheaper. Secondly, the soils of Ararat valley more and more started to be used for agricultural reasons, and the spreading areas of “vordan karmir” have decreased. Nowadays, in Armavir region of Armenia, mostly in the villages of Jrrat (21.52 ha) and Arazat (182 ha) there is a national park called “Vordan Karmir” (219.8 ha) where these special red worms are being protected by the state. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century first archimandrite, then bishop of the Holy Cathedral of Ejmiatsin<sup>12</sup>, Sahak Tsaghkarar tried to reuse the insects for receiving the dye<sup>13</sup>. The same issue was studied by Zh. Hamel who was directed to Armenia by the Russian Empire and who published his studies in the Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of Saint Petersburg<sup>14</sup> and in the journals of the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>15</sup>. The list of those who studied these special insects can be continued

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<sup>11</sup> Van, Armavir, Ervandashat, Artashat, Tigranakert, Vagharshapat, Dvin, Bagaran, Shirakavan, Kars, Ani, Sis, Yerevan

<sup>12</sup> Cathedral of Ejmiatsin (Etchmiatsin) – the mother Cathedral of the Armenian Apostolic Church built in 301-303 after the adoption of Christianity as the state religion of Armenia. Saint Gregory the Illuminator had a vision where the only begotten son of God – Jesus Christ, descended from the sky and showed the place of the future Cathedral. That is why the word Ejmiatsin in the Armenian language means “the descent of the only Begotten”, “ej – է զ – descent” “Miatsin – Մի ած ի ն – the only Begotten Son of God”.

<sup>13</sup> Matenadaran named after Mesrop Mashtots, Manuscript Number 6247.

<sup>14</sup> Bulletin of the Academy of Sciences of Saint Petersburg, Number 6, volume 3, part 2, pages 9-64

<sup>15</sup> Журнал министерства Внутр. Дел, ч. 17, 1835, июль, page 192-217

with the names of B. Kuzin, M. Makaryan, H. Avetyan, M. Ter-Grigoryan, A. Harutyunyan, Kh. Galfayan, A. Musheghyan and others<sup>16</sup>. Nowadays, in the national park they try to increase the number of the insects for them to be reused in dye production again.

The other linguistic example unveils the background of the word “carpet” which is similarly repeated in quite many European languages such as “Karpet” in German, “carpita” in Italian, “carpette” in French which means “rectangular carpet of the room”, “kárpit” in Hungarian and “karpit” in Serbian both of which mean “curtain”, “krpèta” in Serbian which means “table clothes” etc.

The Armenian linguist Hrachya Acharyan in his most monumental work, “Armenian Etymological Dictionary”, shows that “կարպետ (kapert\*-karpet\*\*)” is a native Armenian root which can be seen in many languages. This gives the linguist the base to consider that the above-mentioned words were taken from the Armenian word “կարպետ (karpet)” which the merchants took to Europe. The word shows that “this art was first flourished in Armenia, from which both the art and the word were borrowed by others”<sup>17</sup>.

The opinion of the linguist can be proved by archaeological findings as well which, in their turn, testimony the existence of the older trade roads, too.

In Hermitage museum of Saint Petersburg there is exhibited a carpet called Pazyryk. With woolen warp and fluff, thickness of 3600 knots/dm<sup>2</sup> and size of 198 x 183 cm, it is the oldest almost totally preserved carpet in the world. This important carpet was found in the Altai Mountains, in Pazyryk 5th

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<sup>16</sup> Հայկական օրագրի տարածքում, հատկապես 8, էջ 642, Հայկական օրագրի տարածքում – Armenian Soviet Encyclopedia, volume 8

<sup>17</sup> Հր. Աչարյան, Հայերենի Արևմտաարևելյան բառարան, հատկապես 2 - Հր. Acharyan, Armenian Etymological Dictionary, volume 2

kurgan (a type of burial mound), in the grave of a Scythian nobleman in 1949 by Professor S. Rudenko. The carpet had been frozen in the ice, and that is the reason why it is so well-preserved.



Pic.1. The Pazyryk carpet

According to U. Schurmann, this carpet had been woven in Sakis, in the south of Lake Urmia, in the Scythians' capital city located in Urartu Kingdom as an order of one of the Scythian kings, which was realized by pre-Armenian masters<sup>18</sup>. V. Ganzhorn considers carpet to have been woven in the surroundings of the city Artashat which used to be one of the capital cities of Great Armenia and one of the important centers of the Silk Road.

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<sup>18</sup> Schurmann U., *Der Pazyryk, Seine Deutung und Herkuuft*, New York, 1982



When found, there were expressed different ideas about the place where it had been made. Up to now there are different countries mentioned. However, the studies of U. Schurmann and V. Ganzhorn coincide that this carpet was undoubtedly connected with the Armenian culture and the Armenian highland<sup>19</sup>.

- The carpet is woven with double knot. This is the true characteristic feature of the Armenian carpets. This type of knot is often called “Armenian knot”. Throughout centuries the Armenian carpets have been woven with double knot, and it is still like that. To compare, it can be mentioned that the famous Persian carpets are woven with one knot and a half.



Pic. 2. Double knot versus one knot a half

- The rug is in Hermitage museum where the studies of the specialists of the museum proved the bright red color of the carpet to be the cochineal of the red insects of Ararat valley, Araratian “vordan karmir”.

- The ornaments seem very similar to the frescoes of Urartu kingdom of Armenia. At the same time there are quite many similarities with the images of Persepolis in Iran which again proves the cultural links among the countries.

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<sup>19</sup> Ֆոն լիբրարի Գանցհորնի, Քրիստոնեաւարուէլի ան Գորգը, Ալեքսանդրի ցմիւնչի 18-րդ դարի ընկած պատկերազարդան և պատկերազարդան զարգացման ներվարիծ, թարգմանութիւնը գերմաներէնից՝ Հրայրա Ստեփանյան, Հայաստանի պատմութիւնը թանգարան, Երևան - Volkmar Gantzhorn, Der christlich orientalische Teppich: Eine Darstellung der ikonographischen und ikonologischen Entwicklung von den Anfängen bis zum 18. Jahrhundert, 1991 Benedikt Taschen Verlag]

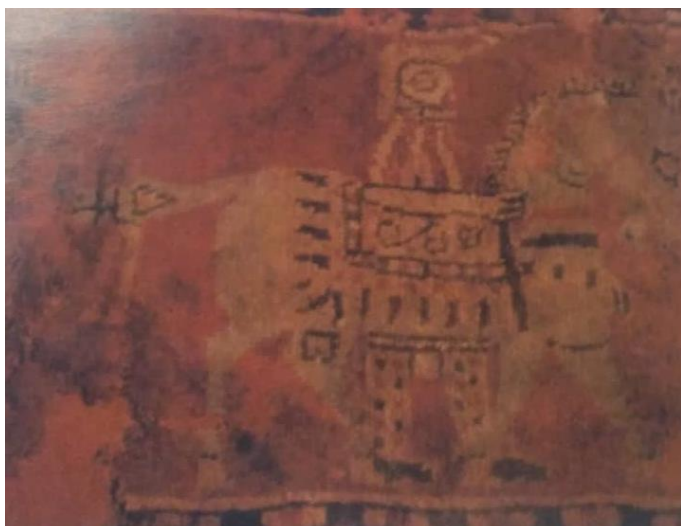
As it has been mentioned above, the rug was found in a kurgan of a Scythian nobleman<sup>20</sup>, but neither the people depicted in the rug look like the Scythians, nor their clothes are similar to the clothes of the Scythian people. The surprising fact is that the images of Persepolis on the eastern stairs of the Apadana represent the Armenian delegation to Iran which totally coincides with the images of the carpet not only with the figures of the men and their headwear but also with the size and the form of the horses. Persepolis depictions are from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. as the carpet itself is.



Pic. 3. Persepolis, the eastern stairs of the Apadana, the Armenian delegation to Iran

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<sup>20</sup> Volkmar thinks, that the kurgan does not have to be a Scythian one and that it could have also been of Phrygian-Armenian character as the Phrygians also used to make kurgans of the same size and form as the one in Gordium., ref. 19, page 50



Pic. 4. One of the images of the Pazyryk carpet

The historians mention that among the main products exported from Armenia there were the Armenian carpets. Various excavations in different parts of Historical Armenia have revealed fragments of carpets which come to prove that the culture of weaving carpets was already famous in the Armenian Plateau still in the 4-3 millennia B.C. In the excavations of Red hill fragments of carpets have been found which can be dated back to the 7-6 centuries B.C. One of the first pieces of information about the Armenian carpets can be found in the famous work of the famous Greek historian Xenophon called “Anabasis”. The Arabic historians also describe the Armenian carpets as the symbol of wealth and the high level of the person in the society among the noblemen in the Arabic caliphate. They were famous in the Arabic caliphate as “Armenian carpets”.

Taking into consideration all the above-mentioned points, one can conclude that Armenia can be considered to be one of the cradles of carpet-making and one of the well-known carpet producers on the Silk Road. The above-mentioned points come to prove that Armenian “vordan karmir” and carpets were of great demand in the ancient and medieval world, and that these exported goods made it quicker for the words “karmir” and “carpet” appear and



be widely used in many of the European languages thus proving the close relations between different countries.

Travelling along the Silk Road enriched not only the merchants' material wealth and the variety of their cargos, but also contributed to the exchange of cultures, languages, ideas and many more along the Great Silk Road.

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