

Research Article

Analysis of Lorenc Antoni from a musicological perspective

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Abstract

Among the many creators whose works hold significant value in musicological studies, Lorenc Antoni (1909, Skopje – 1991, Pristina) stands out as a revered and enduring figure in our collective memory. As one delves deeper into his oeuvre, it becomes evident that his work represents a rich musical spectrum, intertwining diverse elements from the complex world of music. Antoni, a man of broad intellectual culture, was a dedicated educator, composer, conductor, musicologist, and tireless ethnomusicologist. His unwavering passion and perseverance were instrumental in developing a profound and authentic musical culture. He understood the mission of the artist as an active engagement in elevating artistic consciousness and shaping cultural reality, striving to preserve the impressions, experiences, and values of the past and present for the future. His legacy is a treasure, a cultural heritage that serves not only his name and family but also instrumentalists, singers, choirs, orchestras, conductors, educators, musicologists, Albanologists, folklore researchers – indeed, anyone interested in identity and the Albanian ethnocultural world, as well as in musical culture at large. Ultimately, a sense of collective ownership and shared values is a hallmark of a cultivated society. Thus, this paper seeks to honor with profound respect and affection the work of this exceptional artist, with particular focus on his ethnomusicological contributions, aiming to elucidate not only his role within the context of his time but also the enduring impact he has left on generations to follow.

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Introduction

To speak today about the course of Kosovo music in the 20th century – especially the scientific developments in the field of ethnomusicology – without mentioning Lorenc Antoni would be more than an oversight; it would be an injustice. The history of Albanian music would remain incomplete without the name of this pedagogue, cultural organizer, and leader of numerous initiatives, actions, and institutions. Anyone aiming to study Albanian musical folklore must inevitably consult the works of Lorenc Antoni – otherwise, their efforts risk being branded as academically superficial or even scientifically amateurish.



Photo 1. Lorenc Antoni (Web1)

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Recognizing the fact that the cultural significance of an individual's activity depends not only on the quality of the results achieved but also on the positive influence exerted during the cultural development of a specific time, it becomes evident that Lorenc Antoni's scientific, research, and cultural contributions are both broad and profoundly impactful.

The results of his many years of dedicated work represent a high level of achievement in the field of folk music studies – not only in his immediate environment but also across all Albanian – speaking regions. For this reason, Antoni rightfully earns his place among the most distinguished ethnomusicologists, alongside names such as Kostandin Trako (1919–1986), Ramadan Sokoli (1920–2008), Beniamin Kruta (1940–1994), Pirro Miso (1942–), Ramazan Bogdani (1943–), Spiro Shituni (1951–2021), and Sokol Shupo (1954–), among others.

Place of Birth

Lorenc Antoni was born on September 23, 1909, in Skopje – a city marked by a multiethnic, multiconfessional, and multicultural environment. During that period, Skopje was considered a central hub of social, political, economic, and military developments – a city of strategic interest to the Ottoman Empire. It was a place where trade and craftsmanship flourished daily, particularly in leatherwork, weaponry, and silversmithing.

As noted by historians, “Austro–Hungarian goods and capital arriving from the direction of Shkodra, alongside Anglo – French and even Italian imports coming from Thessaloniki, in mutual competition to dominate the Balkan markets, created a favorable moment for the economic growth of Skopje.” (Verli, 2018) This dynamic commercial atmosphere inevitably contributed to the development of the city's infrastructure and, more broadly, to the flourishing of its cultural life.

Family Background

His family, primarily engaged in the craft of silversmithing, was also widely recognized for its valuable contribution to the preservation and cultivation of cultural values. Music in the Antoni household – described as “a daily, monthly, and yearly presence” (Koci, 2008, p. 80), was an essential element of family life and gave young Lanku² both strength and purpose. Thus, the greatest inspiration for finding the right path toward becoming a complete musician came from his parents. From his father, Gjon – a singer and clarinetist – he inherited a deep love for music theory, harmony, orchestration, and the vibrant, limitless world of music. From his mother, Leze, he absorbed a keen curiosity for the lyrics and thematic content of folk songs – an early influence that would later shape his ethnomusicological orientation.³ From his grandmother Maria⁴ (his mother's mother), he learned not only songs from various genres, but also numerous folktales, proverbs, humorous rhymes (*kashelasha*), and other forms of oral creativity. This early exposure to the richness of oral tradition deeply influenced his later dedication to the collection, study, and preservation of Albanian folk heritage. (Antoni, 1982) She was a world unto herself – a living encyclopedia, an inexhaustible source of folklore. Her presence and storytelling left an indelible mark on young Lorenc, nurturing his imagination and shaping his lifelong commitment to the cultural treasures of the Albanian oral tradition.

Education

He completed his primary and secondary education in Skopje, which during that period – thanks to the activities of the Catholic Church (considered a highly organized institution) – was a center of Albanian intellectual life, a cradle of knowledge and culture, and a crossroads of political events. The Catholic Church played a key role in preserving identity – not only religious and cultural, but also national. In this “nursery” of values, various activities took place, not only religious but also educational, social, political, and cultural in nature.

By participating in these activities, Lorenc Antoni acquired not only profound knowledge and valuable experience, but also self – confidence, creative energy, and a firm belief that learning is a lifelong process. Deeply devoted to music

² **Lanku** was the affectionate childhood nickname of little Lorenc Antoni—a tender name used by his family and those close to him, reflecting the warmth and intimacy of his early upbringing.

³ Thus, his mother – whose full name was Terezia but was affectionately called **Leze** – played a vital role in shaping his sensitivity to the lyrical and narrative dimensions of folk music, nurturing in him a deep appreciation for the emotional and cultural depth of traditional song.

⁴ Maria was the sister of the father of Gonxhe Bojaxhiu (Mother Teresa).

– an art to which he surrendered unconditionally – he began to attend private lessons, sparing neither time, nor money, nor effort.

Conducting Activity

The first musical activity that Lorenc Antoni began to engage in, starting in 1927, was conducting. His initial steps in this field were taken with the cultural society of the Albanian – language elementary school, established in 1919 within the Catholic Church in Skopje. He continued his work as a conductor when this society was later joined by a high school student choir, forming a mixed choir.

In the following years, Lorenc conducted the tamburitza orchestra of the Skopje Technical High School and the mandolin orchestra of the Scout Association, and for a brief period, also led the male choir of the trade union organization.

With the outbreak of World War II, the Antoni family was forced to relocate, initially to Ferizaj, where he led the choir of the local elementary school. In 1942, after a short stay in Pristina, they moved to Prizren, where among other roles, he served as the conductor of the city choir. Immediately after the war and until 1956, he intensively led the choir of the “Agimi” Cultural Society, performing around 420 concerts throughout various regions of the former Yugoslavia.

In Prizren, during the years 1948 and 1949, he also conducted the “Budućnost” choir (in Serbo–Croatian). From the late 1950s to the early 1980s, he worked as a folk music editor at Radio Prishtina, where he also led the institution's choir for a significant period. In addition to the Radio Prishtina Choir, he also conducted the mixed choir of the Cultural – Artistic Society “Radnički” (in Serbo–Croatian) for one year.

Every one of his appearances with the ensembles of the time was filled with optimism, enthusiasm, love, and deep emotion. His professionalism, presence, and authority earned the obedience not only of the choir and orchestra, but also of the audience. It is particularly important to note that: *“Lorenc Antoni enjoyed great authority and respect even in international circles... Everyone admired, respected, and consulted him with special reverence, wherever he appeared...”* (Krasniqi, 2009)

Pedagogical Activity

Lorenc Antoni's pedagogical activity is rich, well-known, and highly regarded throughout the Albanian – speaking world, holding a significant place in the educational heritage of Albanian music instruction and pedagogical organization.

Despite difficult circumstances – including lack of literature, space, musical instruments, and professional support – Lorenc Antoni consistently strove to provide students with knowledge both in theory and practice, across scientific and artistic, traditional and contemporary dimensions. His teaching addressed all essential aspects, such as: the fundamental distinguishing features of traditional vocal and instrumental music, its main expressive means, prominent musical styles, characteristic genres, shared and distinct elements, as well as interactions between Gheg and Tosk traditions, rural and urban music, and cultural bridges with the traditional or professional music of neighboring peoples.

At different stages, he worked in the elementary school of Ferizaj, later in the high school of Prishtina, and subsequently in the secondary music school of Prizren. However, it must be emphasized that his teaching and pedagogical advice extended well beyond formal institutional settings – whenever needed – even while serving as a choir or orchestra conductor, ensemble leader, music editor, composer, professional collaborator, advisor, researcher... and as a dedicated citizen.

It is particularly important to highlight that throughout his devoted pedagogical work, Professor Antoni transmitted to his students, with great love, all the theoretical, practical, and aesthetic dimensions related to the evolution of music in general – and Albanian music in particular – awakening and cultivating their musical consciousness.

Creative and Publicistic Activity

As a creator, an intellectual, and a man “with a strategic discourse in the pursuit of professional goals,” his multidimensional reflections can also be described as an unrealized vision – precisely because the intellectual of that time was constantly confronted by ignorance and the ignorant who surrounded him and repeatedly obstructed the realization

of noble goals. Despite this, through the beauty of his art, he aimed to promote true humanism. (Koci, Vibracione të shpirtit shqiptar - Lorenc Antoni, ky bard i muzikës shqiptare dhe misioni i tij reformues e krijues, 2008, p. 83) Unfortunately, however, “the relationship between society, the composer, and the musical work is still not as fair or as mutually understanding as it ought to be.” (Sakač, 1980)

In addition to the many challenges he faced in his noble efforts to organize musical life, he was also confronted with a severe lack of musical literature and a significant gap in choral and instrumental scores – especially in the Albanian language – which would have been essential to his work with various ensembles and musical formations. Despite the countless obstacles he encountered, this erudite creator managed to place thousands upon thousands of notes onto the staff, composing a total of 93 musical works in various forms.

Lorenc Antoni began composing at the age of 17, during the time he was conducting a choir in Skopje. *“A short time after starting my work as a conductor, the idea and desire to compose musical works was born within me. My wish to pursue this idea was further inspired by the beautiful voice of Gonxhe, who would later be known as Mother Teresa, and who was the best singer in the choir in Skopje. By a stroke of luck, I also came across a book of poems by Hil Mosi. Among them, the poem ‘By the Lake’ left a deep impression on me. It truly reflected my innermost feelings. Enthusiastic and inspired by this poem, I quickly composed the music for it in early January 1927. I managed to successfully imitate the waves of the lake and the wind, especially, through the use of sound. This song was performed by the sisters Age and Gonxhe Bojaxhiu in Skopje on March 25, 1928. It was very well received by the audience and was repeated on April 8. This success encouraged and motivated me to continue my musical creativity.”* (Antoni, Dëshirën për komponim ma ngjalli zëri i bukur i Gonxhe Bojaxhiut, 1984) From this period emerged the first compositions of Lorenc Antoni, which were vocal songs. During this initial phase – lasting until the establishment of the cultural society “Agimi” – Antoni composed several monophonic songs, which were performed during the events of the Catholic youth in Skopje. He also harmonized a number of folk songs that were sung by choirs in Skopje, and later by choirs in Ferizaj and Prizren during World War II. Among his instrumental works from this period are “Andante of Longing” for tamburitza orchestra, and a harmonization of a piece by Franz Neruda. (Bejtullahu, Një jetë në muzikë - Lorenc Antoni dhe trashëgimia e tij muzikore, 2010, p. 143) His creative work reached significant achievements, particularly during his time with the “Agimi” Cultural Society in Prizren.

At the foundation of Lorenc Antoni’s creative work lie the beautiful motifs of the inexhaustible folk tradition. Antoni himself acknowledged that there is a significant distinction between the rich Albanian folk music and the European art music tradition; therefore, music based on classical elements should be introduced to the people in a gradual manner. *“The works of Lorenc Antoni do not belong to the forms and genres of the European musical tradition; rather, they emerge from the very substance of folk music.”* (Berisha, 1989, p. 192)

The first two collections of choral songs for mixed choir – “Albanian Choirs”⁵ (1957) and “Echoes of the Heart”⁶ (1958) – which include songs composed between 1945 and 1960, represent a highly important step forward, as they are works in which folk motifs are treated with professional musical approach. *“The traditional and professional musical culture of a nation, people, or ethnic group constitutes a key factor in its very existence.”* (Loli, 2014)

In 1961, the choral suite “Opojanja”⁷ was published, followed ten years later by the collection of choral songs for mixed choir titled “Three Songs from Opoja.”⁸

In Lorenc Antoni’s creative opus, a special place is also held by his compositions for children’s choir, such as “The Sparrows of Kosovo” and “A Defeated Crab”, works that include humorous elements as well.

⁵ This collection includes four compositions for mixed choir: “Mirë mbrema” (Good Evening), “Kanga e Rexhës” (Rexha’s Song), “Shkojti çika” (The Girl Has Gone), and “Hajde dalim kah pazari” (Let’s Go Out to the Market).

⁶ This collection includes six compositions for mixed choir: “Çorapet e burrit” (The Husband’s Socks), “Hasimja trime” (Brave Hasimja), “Lan vasha” (The Maiden Bathed), “Na ka dalë nusja e mirë” (The Good Bride Has Come Out), “Po vijnë krushqit maleve” (The Wedding Guests Are Coming Through the Mountains), and “Ç’janë këta krushq që vijnë” (Who Are These Wedding Guests That Are Arriving?).

⁷ This suite includes five songs for mixed choir: “Sugare” (Mother’s Little Girl), “Piki molla e kuqe” (The Red Apple Fell), “E morën Fatimen” (They Took Fatime), “Gji ma paske ballin” (Your Forehead Is Mine), dhe “Ka ra dilli” (The Sun Has Risen). These compositions are connected in the form of a suite, meaning the final section of one piece flows directly into the beginning of the next.

⁸ “Ani çilma derën” (Please, Open the Door), “Oj lulija jonë” (Oh, Our Flower), and “O lum e lum” (Oh Joy, Oh Joy)..

Together with Vinçenc Gjini, he co – authored a sacred music collection titled “*Book of Choral Church Songs*”, which was published in 1994.

Antoni also distinguished himself in the field of vocal – instrumental compositions. For example, the songs “*Under a Mountain*” (*Nën një mal*) and “*Wedding Dance and Song*” (*Valle e këngë dasme*), interpreted by the great Nexhmije Pagarusha and broadcast for many years on Radio Prishtina, left an indelible mark on the memory of many lovers of refined music.

In 1975, the collection “*Five Musical Works*” was published, which includes the instrumental pieces: “*Albanian Rhapsody No. 1*”, “*The Highlander Woman*” (*Malësorja*), “*In Old Prizren*” (*Në Prizrenin e vjetër*), “*The Good Bride Has Come Out*” (*Na ka dalë nusja e mirë*), and “*Wedding Dance and Song*” (*Valle e këngë dasme*).

It is worth noting that Antoni also composed other works for mandolin and tamburitza orchestras; however, when it comes to his instrumental creations, it must be emphasized that they all stand in the shadow of “*In Old Prizren*”, in terms of aesthetic and artistic value.

All of his works are the manifestation of a specific inner emotional state, shaped by Antoni’s life itself – a life full of events, memories, disappointments, joys, innovations, activities, and struggles, which ultimately brought the composer significant success and artistic achievement.

Ethnomusicological Activity

From an early age, Lorenc Antoni was convinced that Albanian folk music represents a treasure of exceptional value and importance – a vast and richly diverse heritage in both content and form, in quality and genre, in color and melody, in meter and harmony. To explore its essence, its mysteries and unknowns, he understood that courage, knowledge, and deep dedication were essential.⁹ Thanks to his determination and tireless work, researcher Lorenc Antoni succeeded in shedding light on a field that, until then, had remained almost entirely unexplored among Albanians. With undeniable passion and dedication, he set out to collect, process, transcribe (melograph), and archive a rich and diverse body of ethnomusicological material from various Albanian regions – creating a precious cultural heritage of great value for future generations. It is with this bard, this cultural giant, that the first scholarly studies in the field of Albanian ethnomusicology begin.

Between 1956 and 1977, he published seven volumes under the title “*Albanian Musical Folklore*”, in which he transcribed approximately 800 songs into musical notation. “In 1956, he published the first volume, which included 105 folk songs from Skopje, Ferizaj, Prizren, and Gjakova. The second volume, published in 1961, contained 106 songs, most of which were collected during a research expedition in Opoja and the Ulqin region. The third volume (1964) brought 110 songs, the majority of which were gathered in Macedonia (Skopje, Tetova, Gostivar, Kërçova, Dibra, Struga, Prespa, Kumanova). The fourth volume was published in 1970 and presented 112 songs collected over different periods, most from the Dardana region. The fifth volume (1972) included 122 songs from various periods and Albanian territories. The final two volumes were published in 1974 and 1977. In the sixth volume, 122 songs were presented, including several polyphonic, heterophonic, and bifonic (two – voiced) songs. The seventh volume brought together 93 songs from different regions, structured similarly to the previous volume.” (Bejtullahu, Një jetë në muzikë - Lorenc Antoni dhe trashëgimia e tij muzikore, 2010, pp. 138-139) Through the notation and publication of these volumes, the distortion, misinterpretation, or disappearance of a highly significant sphere of the spiritual heritage of Albanians in the former Yugoslavia has been effectively prevented. The value of these volumes has also been acknowledged by Croatian ethnomusicologist Dunja Rihtman – Šotrić, who emphasized that, through the publication of Mr. Antoni’s collections, “*we have been given the opportunity to closely become acquainted with the musical creativity of the Albanian people.*” (Shotriq, 1972, p. 215)

“The recording and magnetophone registration of a large number of our folk songs, and their transcription by Lorenc Antoni some 70–80 years ago, constitutes not only a valuable testimony to a vital tradition, but also a powerful indication that – despite external influences, changes, and modifications linked to the everyday life of our people – it

⁹ Lorenc Antoni understood that a good ethnomusicologist must, above all, be a great scholar, as the role involves extensive contact with various layers of society, with different dialects, customs, rituals, traditions, and temperaments.

has succeeded in preserving its original forms, traditional singing styles, and many other distinctive and authentic elements, both in rural areas and in the urban musical tradition. Through their recording and documentation, these songs have been granted a form of immortality – as living forms that, at any time, can be interpreted in their original shape, just as transcribed by the author of these collections. Moreover, they can serve as material for compositional creativity in so – called serious music, or as a foundation for various comparative studies.” (Sheholli, 2011, pp. 11-13)

These collections include songs of various types and genres, forms and styles—songs that belong to both the old and the new musical traditions. Some are intended for entertainment purposes, while others serve ritual, practical, and functional roles. As noted by the renowned German ethnomusicologist Fritz Bose: “*While for us music is art (a means of entertainment), for the majority of the world’s peoples it is much more than that – it is a magical release in relation to cosmic laws, a vehicle for ethical norms, and an inseparable part of human life.*” (Bose, Etnomuzikologjia (Përkthyer nga Bekim Ramadani), 2019, p. 47)

“Folk songs are indicators of a people’s intellectual development and a mirror of their life. Through songs, the people pour out their emotions and immortalize their lives with the heroism and deeds of the past. In them, they find spiritual nourishment and entertainment; thus, in sorrow and in joy, at weddings and dances, during the harvest and grape gathering, while embroidering and spinning, in the fields and in the mountains, songs flow abundantly as if from a rich spring. Therefore, it can rightly be said that the people are an eternal and great singer.” (Miladinov, 2012, p. 15) From the heart of the people emerged Lorenc Antoni, whose portrait reflects not only the concerns of his people, the issues of his time, the fate of his contemporaries, their sorrows, sufferings, virtues, and joys – but also the inspiring call to elevate the cultural consciousness of future generations. As the renowned Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky once said: “Every work of art is a child of its time and, often, the mother of our emotions.”

Conclusion

From what has been presented thus far, we may conclude that Lorenc Antoni dedicated his entire life to bringing to light the genuine values of Albanian art music. He was a pedagogue, ethnomusicologist, composer, conductor, organizer of musical life, tireless cultural worker, and a committed scholar who matched the scientific standards of his time. Despite some criticism that he followed the school of Miodrag Vasiljević rather than, for example, the research methodologies of M. Živković, Doris and Erich Stockmann, or Cvjetko Rihtman, Antoni’s work remains foundational and deeply respected in the field of Albanian musical scholarship.¹⁰

As a pedagogue, he succeeded in eliminating from the minds of his students expressions of irony, bitterness, distrust, and ignorance – awakening and nurturing in them a love for music, for folklore, and for diverse and authentic cultural values.

As an organizer of cultural life, he became the epicenter of a circle of talented activists, musicians, singers, and art enthusiasts.¹¹ (Minci, 2014)

As a founder of cultural institutions, he ensured that the activities conducted there reached a level where they became an integral part and an inseparable factor of the spiritual life of our people.

As a conductor, he laid the foundations for practical work that, for that time and those regions, was underdeveloped, if not completely unknown.

As a composer, he succeeded in presenting the characteristics and features of folk music in higher, more refined, more perfected, and more artistic forms – “*whether in harmonized, stylized, or arranged choral songs, or in vocal, vocal – instrumental, and orchestral compositions*” (Ballata, 1987, p. 68) – thus laying the groundwork for a new initiative, a creative and noble endeavor. As a composer, he also managed to radiate the virtue of a person who, with ease, beauty, and spontaneity, finds and establishes forms of cooperation with others, demonstrating that the ethical aspect is a value without which the creator, no matter how genuine, cannot gain the proper authority.

¹⁰ See more in Bahtir Sheholli’s paper, “On the Value and Importance of the ‘Albanian Musical Folklore’ Volumes by Lorenc Antoni”, Gjurmime albanologjike – Folklor dhe etnologji, 40-2010, Albanological Institute, Pristina, 2011.

¹¹ Singer Semahate Mashkulli, in an interview with journalist Fisnik Minci, recalls: “... there was no other activity or gathering place, except for ‘Agimi’, which brought together young people for songs and dances.”

As a scholar, he always kept in mind that subjectivism in science affirms prejudice, provokes undesired emotion, gesture, and thought, and compromises intellectual and scientific ethics in general. Therefore, he placed the truth above any personal interest, striving to competently and respectfully explore the values of our rich ethnocultural tradition.

Professor Lorenc Antoni harmoniously synthesized thought and practical action, becoming a distinguished humanist in the scientific and cultural development field. To find, discover, decipher, and understand is a titanic task; it is exhausting, laborious, but also a duty when it concerns a determined person with clear principles, foresight, and high ideals, as Lorenc Antoni was.

He traced, collected, clarified, systematized, and archived vast materials from the musical folklore of the Albanians in Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Kosovo, providing sufficient explanations and necessary formal and structural analyses.

Based on all of this, the conclusion is drawn that Lorenc Antoni is an unwavering pillar of Albanian musical culture and, not infrequently, an inspiration for enlightening purposes. Now, as the meaningful expression of the renowned Bohemian – Austrian composer and conductor Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) comes to mind: “Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire,” I wholeheartedly declare that Lorenc Antoni is the eternal flame of Albanian ethnomusicological tradition, a fire from whose brilliance the minds of thousands of musicians, scholars, and folklore enthusiasts have been illuminated.

Biodata of Author



Dr. Bekim Ramadani was born in 1970 in the village of Orashje near Tetovo. He completed his primary and secondary education in his hometown. In 2001, he graduated from the Faculty of Music at the State University of Tetova. He earned his Master's degree in Musicology in Tirana in 2006 and completed his PhD in Ethnomusicology in Skopje in 2018. He works as a lecturer at the Faculty of Music, University of Tetova, where he teaches subjects related to folk music and music informatics.

For over two decades, he has also served as a music teacher at the “Kiril Pejçinoviç” Gymnasium in Tetovo, where he successfully led the school choir. As an active member and artistic leader of the folklore ensemble “Xheladin Zeqiri” in Tetovo, as well as co-founder of the group “Margaritarët,” he has contributed to the promotion and preservation of Albanian folk music both locally and internationally. His research focuses on the documentation, transcription, and analysis of Albanian traditional music, as well as the cultural role of music in contemporary society. He has presented at numerous academic conferences and published essays in scientific and cultural journals. He is the author, co-author, or translator of over 20 books in the fields of ethnomusicology, traditional music, and music education, contributing significantly to the preservation and transmission of Albanian musical folklore. **E-mail:** b_ramadani@yahoo.com **ORCID:** 0009-0007-6108-1851 **Affiliation:** Faculty of Music, University of Tetova, Tetovo, North Macedonia.

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