

# Ferdynand Kasler's architecture of harmonious modernism

## Abstract

The subject of the article is the study of works, created by architect Ferdynand Kasler in the interwar period in the city of Lviv/Lwów/Lemberg, Galicia. It depicts the urban and residential development of the city and the role of modern architecture. Using examples of the works built by Kasler and other architects, the author demonstrates, that Ferdynand Kasler was the founder of the direction of "harmonious modernism" in the mainstream style of architecture of modernism. Unfortunately, he was murdered during the holocaust and forgotten as a very important architect of his time.

Keywords: Architecture, Ferdynand Kasler, harmonious modernism, Lviv

If we look at the so-called "genetic plan" (ill. 1) of the central part of modern day Lviv, which reflects the scale and planning structure of its development and its relation to open spaces, then we will see the real space and meaning of the period of antebellum modernism in the urbanist geometry of the city. Buildings were concentrated in the former 1st Halickie, and 4th Łyczakowski

Districts, which were notable for having the lowest population density (about 4,000 persons/km<sup>2</sup>) and had the most usable resources on their territories. These districts lie to the South and East of the city. In the very geometry of the buildings one can see, that it mainly concentrates on filling already existing, not adding on to First World War neighbor-

Ill. 1. Interbellum construction (red) in the structural ("genetic") map of the central part of modern day Lviv. Source: Bohdan Cherkas. Graphic assistance: Natalya Mysak

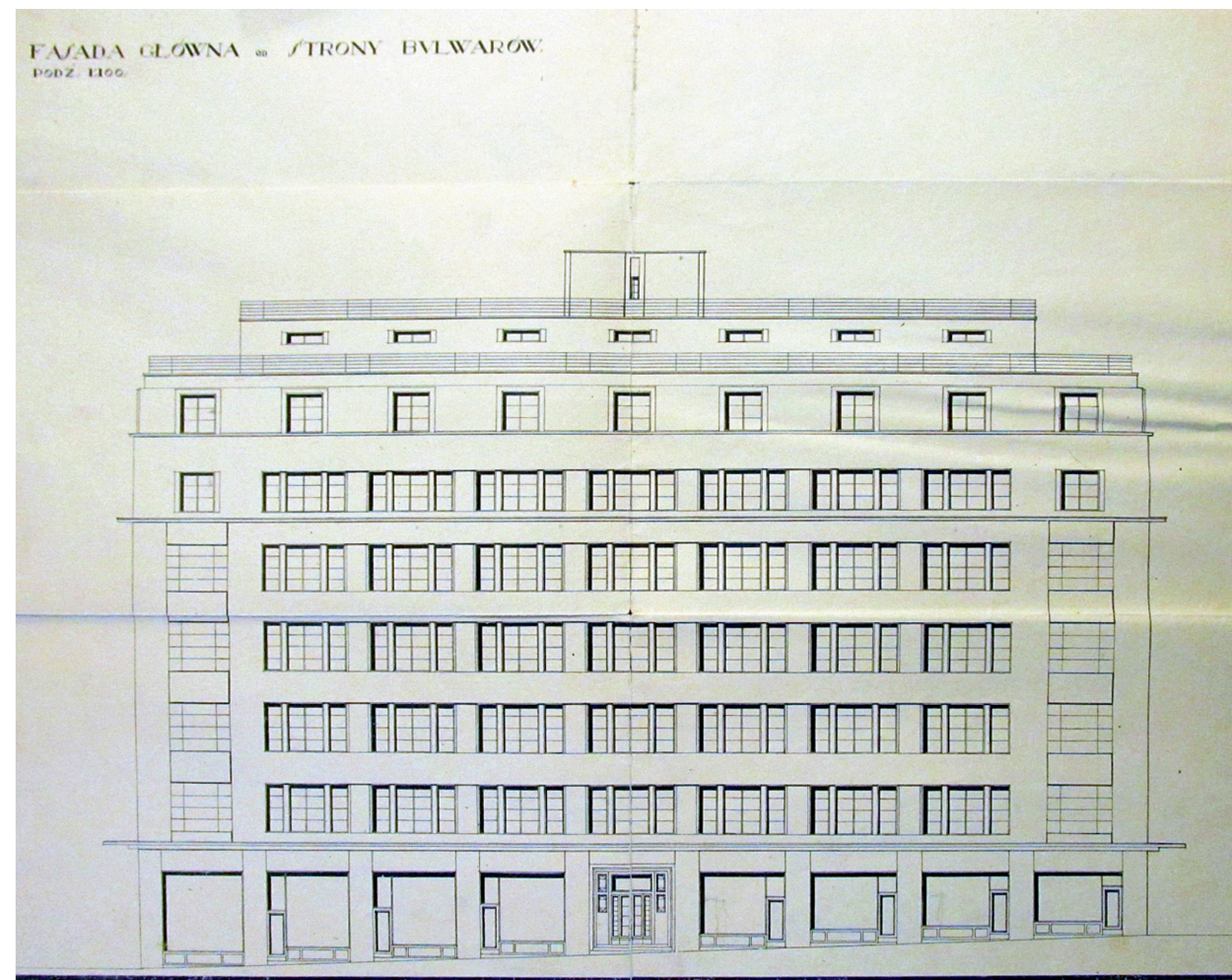




Ill. 2. A view of Akademicka Street (today's Shevchenko Blvd.) in Lviv around 1930. At the end of the boulevard—the modernist building built by Ferdynand (Feiweł) Kasler for Jonas Sprecher in 1928-1929. Source: Marek Münz, photo 13–18 cm., Lviv Historical Museum

hoods. Along the periphery of the expanded city, thanks to villages after 1931, Lviv forms a fragile single-family development of various architectural character (Krzywczycze, Kozielniki, Persenkówka, Pohulianka, Sofiówka, Bohdanówka). According to its planning structure this is a transitional style between urban and rural buildings,

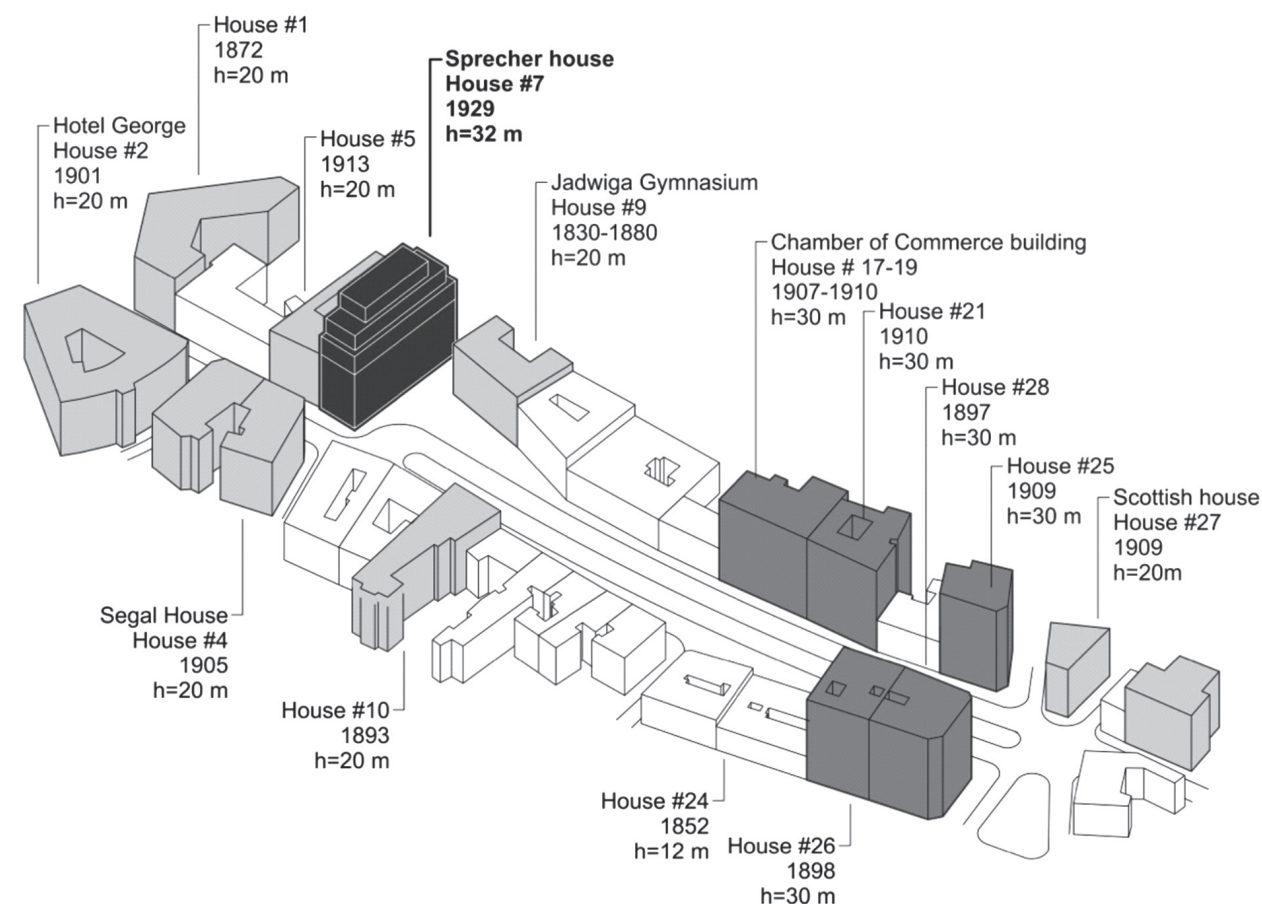
Ill. 3. Ferdynand Kasler, the architectural drawing of the main façade of the Sprecher Building, Akademicka Street 7, Lviv, 1928. Source: State Archives of the Lviv Oblast (further DALO), fund 2, description 1, case 42, sheet 16, Fasada główna od strony bulwarów (Main Façade from the boulevard), 61x52cm., paper, touche



the number of which has increased significantly in the "Greater Lviv." However, these residential creations ("Professor's Colony," "Own Roof," "Iron Water," and "Bohdanówka") appeal to the popular at that time in Europe Howardese ideas of garden-cities. The architecture of such a building often uses the motives of so-called "manor-house style," "zakopane style" and other folk and decorative motifs that often had little in common with the principles of classical modernism.

Another factor, which allows discussing the architecture of Lviv modernism as one that was formed on evolutionary and not revolutionary principles, is that it was created largely by those architects who worked in Lviv up to the First World War. Almost all of them were graduates of the "Lviv Polytechnic" school of architecture<sup>1</sup>. Witold Minkiewicz, Ferdynand Kasler, Jan Bagieński, Tadeusz Wróbel, Leopold M. Karasiński, Józef Awin, the younger Zbigniew Wardzała, Andrzej Frydecki, Eugen Nahirnyj, Ryszard Hermelin, Jakub Menker, Henryk Sandig, the main creators of Lviv's modernism, were actively connected to Lviv and to the traditional Galician cultural environment.

Consider this evolutionary or harmonious manifestation of modernism using the example of several urban ensembles in the city. One of the most famous and popular representative spaces of the city is now Shevchenko boulevard, formerly known as

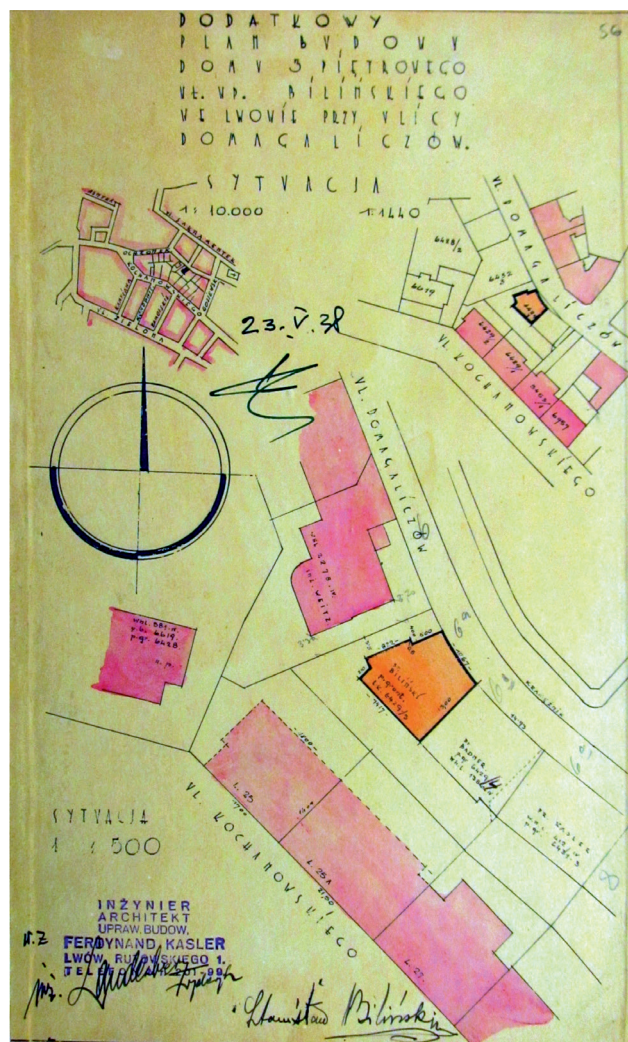


Ill. 4. Image depicting the architectural composition of Akademicka Street (today's Shevchenko Blvd.) in Lviv. Source: Bohdan Cherkes. Graphic assistance: Anton Kolomeycev

Akademicka Street (ill. 2).<sup>2</sup> Although the area as a settlement along the Poltva was already known from the 15 century, as a street it started to form in the 18 century, especially after the Lviv University was moved to the former Jesuit Collegium on St. Mikolaya Street in 1848. However, it came to take on its current representation only after 1896 when the Poltva River was channeled underground. Along its axis a green boulevard was created, and along the Avenue construction unfolded briskly. The Modernistic office "skyscraper" (ill. 3), which was built in 1928–29 by Ferdynand (Feiweł) Kasler for the entrepreneur Jonas Sprecher was the last fundamental structure and completed the formation of a representative area on the north-east side, before it flowed into Mickiewicz Square (formerly Marjacki square) and then into the main avenue of the city – today's Svobody Boulevard (formerly Legionów and Hetmańska Streets). Here also opened up the view onto the Latin Cathedral, and across Teatralna Street (formerly Rutowskiego) one could enter the historic city center. Prior to Kasler an entire pleiad of dazzling Lviv architects of the older generation, particularly Tadeusz Obmiński, Jan Schulz, Alfred Zacharijewicz, Julian Cybulski, Jakub Bałaban worked on the boulevard. The main architectural directions in which they worked were various neo-styles, eclectic and secession, characteristic of the turn of the nineteenth

century. Building height ranged from 10 to 30 m. and the silhouette, despite the high quality of elaboration and richness of the plaster facades, gave a rather chaotic impression. However, the overall trend was pointing to increasing the height of the buildings (ill. 9). Thus, new buildings that were built at the beginning of the avenue, from the end on which today stands the monument to Hrushevsky (formerly Akademicki Square) and Saksahanskoho Street on both its sides (even side: No. 28, architect Jakub Bałaban, 1897 and on the odd side: No. 25, architect Jan Schulz, 1911) were already almost 30 m. high including their attics. This was more than 20 meters higher than the average height of the buildings on the avenue which were built in the middle of the nineteenth century, which can be seen in the oldest house on the avenue under No. 24, built back in 1852.

This trend of monumentalizing and radically raising the height of the buildings on Akademicka Street at the turn of the century, is well demonstrated with today's Prosecutor's building (formerly the Chamber of Commerce) under No. 17–19, built in 1907–1910 by Alfred Zacharijewicz and Tadeusz Obmiński.<sup>3</sup> The height of the building (about 30m.), set centrally on the avenue across from today's Du-



Ill. 5. Ferdynand Kasler, Map of the development of Kochanowskiego Street (today's Levytskoho Street) and Domagaliczów Street (today's Akademicka Pavlova Street) in Lviv, 1938. Source: DALO, fund 2, description 2, case 2258, sheet 56. Dodatkowy plan budowy (Additional Building Plan). Sytuacja (Situation), 29x18cm., paper, touche, watercolor

dayeva Street (former Zimorowicza), the use of expensive materials and forms of monumentalizing secession fixed the new grand scale of Akademicka Street. It is no accident that the adjacent house, No. 21, designed by Jan Schulz built in 1910 in the Moorish Revival architectural style preserved the new scale of the boulevard. Ferdynand Kasler, receiving orders for the second high-rise Sprecher building in the mid – 1920s, was in a very difficult position. The customer was demanding a revenue producing office building, but had had a bad experience interacting with Lviv restorers, particularly with Tadeusz Obmiński, who was the main conservator of Lviv's monuments. It was this situation that caused Kasler to redesign the project and reduce the height of the first Sprecher building, which was finally built on Marjacki Square in 1921.<sup>4</sup> The new situation was also complicated by the fact that across from the plot where the second Sprecher skyscraper was to be erected stood one of Obmiński's best works of the Secession period – the Segal building (Akademicka Street, No. 4), built in 1905. (ill. 4). Additio-

nally, the site was very narrow and measured 11.1 m. by 49.8 m.

It must be acknowledged that Kasler, brilliantly coped with his task, designing a modern building out of a reinforced concrete frame and neutral functionalist forms. The total height of the building was 33.51 m.; it consisted of two underground and eight above-ground floors of variable height (from 3.65 in the top floor to 4.1 m. in the basement) and ledges that extended from the main facade of the 7–8 floors.<sup>5</sup> Aside from the rhythmically spaced large windows, the entire building is encircled by horizontally protruding thin belts on the upper edge of the first, fifth and sixth floors. With their help Kasler incorporated the architecture of the Sprecher building with the heights of Tadeusz Obmiński's Segal building opposite and the adjoining light, proportionately refined eclectic residential building at No. 5, built in 1913 by Jan Schulz.

Additionally, Kasler's Sprecher building skillfully completed the entire urban composition of Prospect Shevchenka, combining into a single unit its entire 394-meter length from today's square housing the monument to Hrushevskiy (formerly Akademicki Square) to Mickiewicz Square (formerly Marjacki Square). Using the laconic language of architectural modernism, he was able to combine the above described eclectic system of the main landmarks of Akademicki Street and transfer it to another, more representative spatial scale. Due to the strong neutral blocks of modern architecture it was possible to allow for a wide boulevard that ranges from 33 m. at the start, to 37 m. in the middle by the former Chamber of Commerce –and spreads to 60 m in front of the Sprecher building before flowing into the narrow 18 m. wide section of Shevchenka Boulevard and spilling onto the broad expanse of Lviv's main squares and representative avenues around and in the center of the historic center.

These principles of harmonious modernism were used by Ferdynand Kasler in other parts of the city. In particular, as an architect and urbanist he participated in the creation of the residential area on Levitskiy Street (formerly Kochanowskiego) and Academician Pavlov Street (former Domagaliczów) (ill. 5).<sup>6</sup> Kochanowskiego Street was created along the picturesque Pasiky stream which flowed from the hills of Pohulyanka and along which coursed the border between the 1st, Halickie and 4<sup>th</sup> Łyczakowskie Districts.<sup>7</sup> Even before the war, in this area, Kasler designed an entire series of large-scale residential buildings using steep tiled roofs, large window openings, balconies, bay windows, as well as elements of classical architecture and monumentalized secession. These residential buildings include the very popular and expensive residential complex on Kochanowskiego Street No. 11–15 and the large-scale (height 32m.) building No. 26 with elements of eclectic and German Romanticism. Therefore residential buildings No. 25–25A (ill. 13), which Kasler built for Dr. Badnera in 1938, literally

in front of his own pre-war building No. 26, were actually an extension of his work at a new stage of development, using interwar modernism, language and principles which he had mastered brilliantly.

An example is the next building on the street which runs parallel to Kochanowskiego Street, Domagaliczów 6A (currently Academicka Pavlova Street), which Kasler built for Stanisław Biliński 1938–39.<sup>8</sup> The next buildings he built at that time, on the basis of functionalism for Dr. Badnera (No.8) and Franciszka Kasler (No.10), formed the entire Domagaliczów Street, in which Kasler, on the very eve of the start of World War II, finally declared the principles of harmonious modernism, as the main ones which took into account the topography and scenery of the areas, the existing urban scale and the need for its complement or accentuation, depending on the prevailing environment and objectives which exist at the creation of any urbanist composition (ill. 6).

Unfortunately Ferdynand Kasler suffered the tragic fate of many prominent people, especially Jews of his generation. In 1943 he was murdered by the Nazis in the Janowski concentration camp near Lviv.<sup>9</sup> History viewed him and his legacy so cruelly, that practically no documentary evidence of this remarkable man's life remain except for his architectural designs.

At the same time, the principles of harmonious modernism in interwar Lviv urbanism were professed by other architects of the period. We see them in different interpretations of functionalist residential buildings between Kopernica and Doroshenko Streets (formerly Sykstuska Street), on the street Heroyiv Maydanu (formerly Kadecka Street), in constructions near Sakharova Street (formerly Wulecka Street) and Hlybokoyi and Novyy Svit Streets, in the works of Witold Minkiewicz, especially in his 1927 complex of residential houses of the Functionaries' Pension Department on Stryiska Street No. 36–42 and further buildings (No. 50–76) on the same street.<sup>10</sup> This principle of harmony, based on the rules of jurisdiction, spontaneity, scale, and agreeability with the formed urban structure of the city is one of the largest contributions made by the Lviv School of Architecture in the history of urban culture and urban modernism in general.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Prof.dr.hab.inż.arch. Bohdan Cherkas, Faculty of Environmental Engineering and Land Surveying, University of Agriculture in Kraków, ORCID: 0000-0001-6809-956X
- <sup>2</sup> Czerner O., Juszkiewicz I., Jasieńko E. (Red.), Praojcowie i Ojcowie. Dorobek polskich absolwentów wydziału architektonicznego Politechniki Lwowskiej, Wrocław: Muzeum Architektury, 1994, 83s.
- <sup>3</sup> Melnyk, I., Halytske peredmystya ta pividno-skhidni okolytsi Korolivskoho stolychnoho mista Lvova, Lviv: Apriori, 2012, pp. 106–126; Biryulov, Y., Rudnytsky, A., Somochkin, I., Frukht, S., (Ed.), Lviv. Turystychnyy putivnyk, Lviv: „Centr Evropy” Publishers, 1999, pp. 132–140.
- <sup>4</sup> Zhuk, I., Torhovo-promyslova palata. Istoryko-arkhitekturnyy atlas Lvova, Seriya II, Lviv: „Centr Evropy” Publishers, 1998, p. 19.



Ill. 6. Ferdynand Kasler, A view of the residential building on Kochanowskiego Street (today's Levytskoho Street), 25/25A in Lviv, 1937. Source: DALO, fund 2, description 1, case 5320, sheet 100, photo, 9x15cm

<sup>5</sup> Biryulov, Y.(Ed.), *Arkhitektura Lvova. Chas i styli XIII – XXI century*, 2008, pp. 485–487.

<sup>6</sup> DALO(State Archive of Lviv Oblast), Fund 2, Description 1, Case 42, Akademicka St, 7, 18 sheets of drafts.

<sup>7</sup> DALO, Fund 2, Description 1, Case 5320, Levytskiy St., 25.25A, p. 105.; DALO, Fund 2, Description 2, Case 2258, Pavlova St., 6a, p. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Melnyk, I., Zahayska, R., *Lychakivske peredmystya ta skhidni okolytsi Korolivskoho stolychnoho mista Lvova*, Lviv: Centr Evropy, 2013, pp.134–145.

<sup>9</sup> DALO, Fund 2, Description 2, Case 2258, p. 70.

<sup>10</sup> Biryulov, Y., Kasler Ferdynand (Feiweil), *Encyclopedia Lvova*, Kozyskiy, A., Ed., T.3, Lviv: Litopys, 2010, pp. 139–141.

<sup>11</sup> Minkiewicz W., *Domy mieszkalne Zakładu Pensyjnego Funkcjonariuszów we Lwowie*, - in: *Architektura i Budownictwo*, 1927, Nr.11–12, pp. 347–352; Cielątkowska R., *Architektura i urbanistyka Lwowa II Rzeczypospolitej*, 1998, pp.85–187; Łypka T., *Architektura Lwowa okresu międzywojennego (1918–1939)*, - in: *Lithuania, 1/2 (18/19)*, 1996, pp. 59–75; Bohdanova, Y., *Arkhitektura mizhvoyennoho dvadtsyatylitnya (1919–1939)*, - in: *Arkhitektura Lvova. Chas i styli XIII – XXI century*, Biryulov, Y. (Ed.), Lviv: „Centr Evropy” Publishers, 2008, pp. 524–570.

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