

After the formation of the *Nederlandsche Spoorwegen* (Dutch Railways) as a collaboration between private railway companies around 1920, virtually no railway posters were issued anymore. Competition through advertising had become obsolete. Only with the economic crisis the railways started recruiting new travelers by advertising discount tickets and day trips.

This coincided with the popularity of the French designer Cassandre, who put the advertising industry on a new track with his stylized posters of the *Nord Express* and *Étoile du Nord*. Around 1930 he began working for Dutch companies such as the Holland America Line and Philips. The influence of Cassandre, together with the railway's advertising campaigns, resulted in a series of beautiful posters in the 1930s.

by Arjan den Boer

Dutch railway posters of the 1930s

Safe, Quick, Economical



REIST PER



SPOOR

VEILIG
SNEL
COMFORTABEL

Nicolaas van de Vecht

The Dutch Railways' tagline *Safe, Quick, Economical* became very well known in the 1930s and would remain in vogue after the war. There is an early poster from around 1932 showing a different slogan: *Save, Fast, Comfortable*. Apparently *Economical* proved to be the better slogan in the Netherlands.

The three promotional terms were depicted by a semaphore in safe position, a winged wheel and a traveler with newspaper and cigar reclining on a train couch. The parts are remarkably loosely interconnected. The poster was just signed v.d.V. — this must be Nicolaas van de Vecht (1886-1941), who also monogrammed his book illustrations this way. Trained at the Amsterdam School of Applied Arts, he was not only a lithographer but also a typographer and watercolorist.



The posters that Nicolaas van de Vecht created for the Amsterdam Art Society in the 1920s had quite a different style. At that time he was still influenced by symbolism and the graphic design style of the Amsterdam School as applied by the Wendingen magazine. His stamp designs from the 1920s had a much more modern feel.

NEDERLANDSCHE SPOORWEGEN



**GOEDEREN -
VERVOER**

**AMSTERDAM - TWENTE
ROTTERDAM**
VICE - VERSA

NIEUWE NACHTREINEN

Agnes Canta

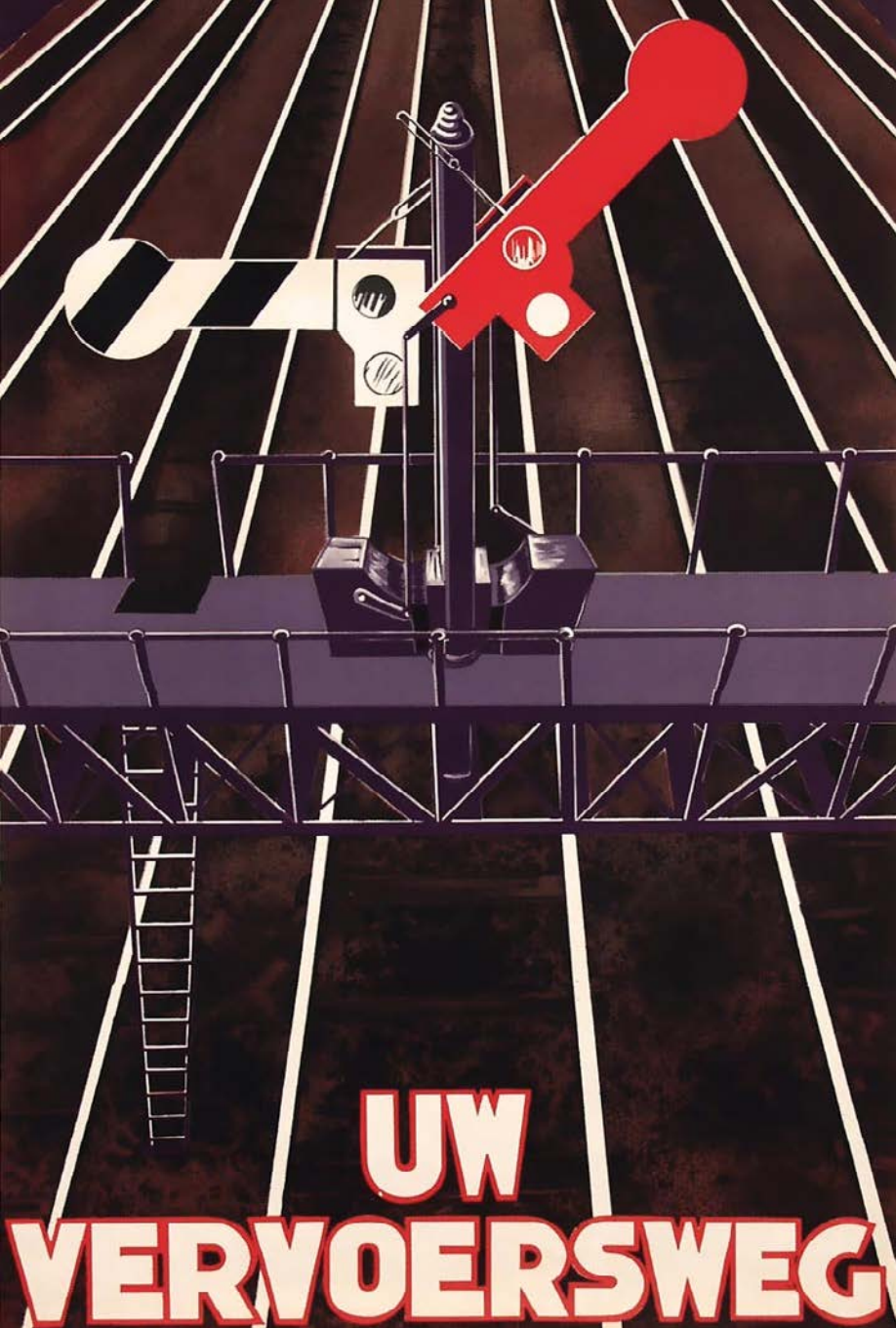
The only woman who designed posters for the Dutch Railways before WW II was Agnes Canta (1888-1964). After her training at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rotterdam she worked as a graphic artist, book cover designer and painter. She painted landscapes, still lifes, animals and caricatures.

In the early 1930s Canta designed many posters for the Utrecht Jaarbeurs fair. During the same period she was commissioned by the Dutch Railways to promote night trains to the east of the Netherlands – for freight, that is. As the poster shows, the ports of Amsterdam and Rotterdam were directly connected to the Twente textile mills. The powerful typography and almost primary colors render a robust result.



"Improvement through cooperation."

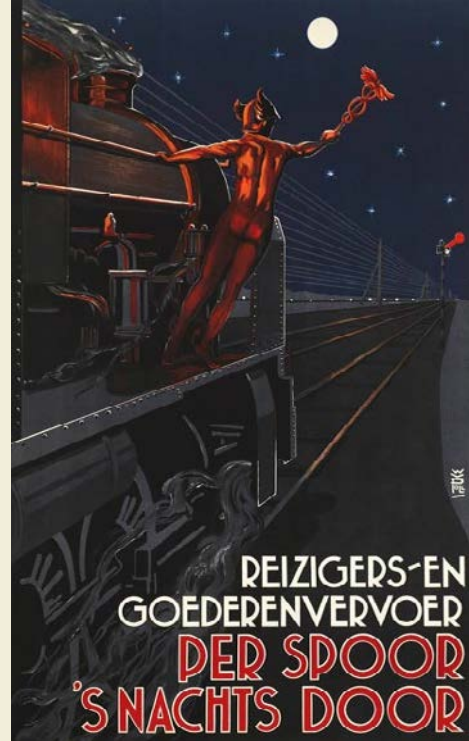
A railway company advertising together with an animal protection organization is probably quite unique. This was just what happened in the 1931 Agnes Canta poster for livestock transport by train. The benefit for the animals was hygiene and speed – the shorter the trip the better. But the poster was not as fine as the freight poster.



Willy van de Poll

In 1932 the Amsterdam commercial artist and photographer Willy van de Poll (1893-1951) created two railway posters with similar dark colors, but far apart in substance. One shows an almost abstract image of modern rail technology. On the other poster, which advertised night transport, Mercury, the god of trade, stands on a locomotive with his caduceus. The designer reverted back to 19th-century railway symbolism in this case.

Van de Poll used photos as a starting point. In the magazine of the Advertising Society he called his camera his associate, assistant, right hand and travel companion. For *Your Way of Transport* he photographed the western signal bridge of Amsterdam Central Station. On the 'primal image' for *Overnight by Rail* a railway employee posed on the locomotive as Mercury, but not naked!



"Drawing a locomotive from scratch is very well possible, but to draw a 3900 engine technically correct for experts without guidance is not feasible, even if one can ignore the small details. The main lines must be correct and a snapshot is the fastest solution."

Willy van de Poll, 'Trade snapshots', in: *Reclame*, 1932



**KANT
EN
KLAAR
TOCHTJES**

DOOR MOOI NEDERLAND

TALRIJKE ZOMERTOCHTJES VOOR VOLWASSENEN
EN KINDEREN (VARIATIES ZIJN STEEDS MOGELIJK)

N.S. REGELEN ALLES VOORUIT: TREIN-BOOT-AUTOTOCHT-MAALTIJD
EEN HEERLIJKE DAG SAMEN UIT ZONDER ZORGEN

Fré Drost

Groningen-born Fré Drost (1907-1987) was trained as a drawing teacher and skilled himself in commercial graphics. Around 1930 he became an illustrator and designer at the firm Joh. Enschedé in Haarlem. His posters for flower shows were widely known. Besides his work as a graphic designer Drost also created drawings, paintings and watercolors.


In 1935 Drost made a cheerful railway poster about ready-made trips through beautiful Holland under the motto "A lovely day out without worries". Different modes of transport, such as train, boat and bus, are shown in a sunlit landscape. A year later a modified version appeared with a more elaborate bus and even some airplanes.

8-DAAGSCHE ABONNEMENTEN



In 1930 the Dutch Railways had introduced an 8-day rail pass for unlimited travel throughout the country. It was widely advertised. The 1936 poster by Fré Drost emphasized that one could travel in all directions of the compass – and optionally take a bike along.

A draft shows that Drost had originally envisioned a much more detailed compass and a larger yellow area. The minimalism of the final version produces a strong result.



VACANTIE KAARTEN

A) Gewone Vacantiekaarten
 (ENKELE REIS)

dagelijks van 1 Juli t/m 15 September '38

1e klasse	2e klasse	3e klasse
f7.50	f5.75	f4.-

B) Retour Vacantiekaarten
 Maandags, Dinsdags, Woensdags, Donderdags
 van 4 Juli t/m 15 September 1938

Heen geldig op den dag der afstempeling
 Terug op denzelfden of den volgende(n) dag

1e klasse	2e klasse	3e klasse
f11.25	f8.65	f6.-

Jean Walther

The Swiss graphic artist Jean Walther (1910-1968) moved to Amsterdam in 1934 and would leave for the United States at the beginning of the Second World War. He was a student of Cassandre and adopted his sleek, objective style. Walther's shipping, aviation and railway posters reflected the power and speed of transportation.

On the poster for holiday tickets, which first appeared in 1936, an express steam locomotive of the NS 3900 series is the main motive. It has characteristic smoke deflectors. The almost frontal view was probably inspired by the famous French *Exactitude* poster, created by Pierre Fix-Masseau in 1932.



NEDERLANDSCHE SPOORWEGEN
SEPTEMBER 1936

ZONDAG	6	13	20	27	
MAANDAG	7	14	21	28	
DINSDAG	1	8	15	22	29
WOENSDAG	2	9	16	23	30
DONDERDAG	3	10	17	24	1
VRIJDAG	4	11	18	25	2
ZATERDAG	5	12	19	26	3

NAAR ENGELAND 'S NACHTS VIA HOEK - 'S DAAGS VIA VLISSINGEN

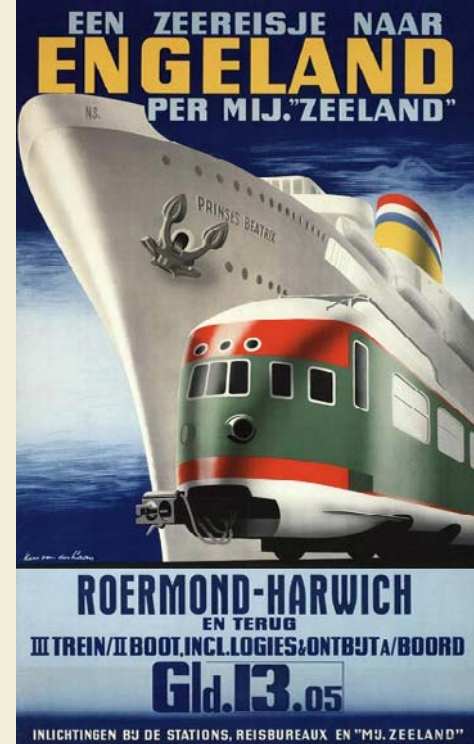
For the Dutch Railways, Jean Walther also created an illustrated calendar for the year 1936. The September sheet shows the connection to England via Hook of Holland (night ferry) and Flushing (day ferry). The steam train in front of the large steam ship is a nice coalescence of the advertising images that Walther created for several shipping companies as well as the railways.



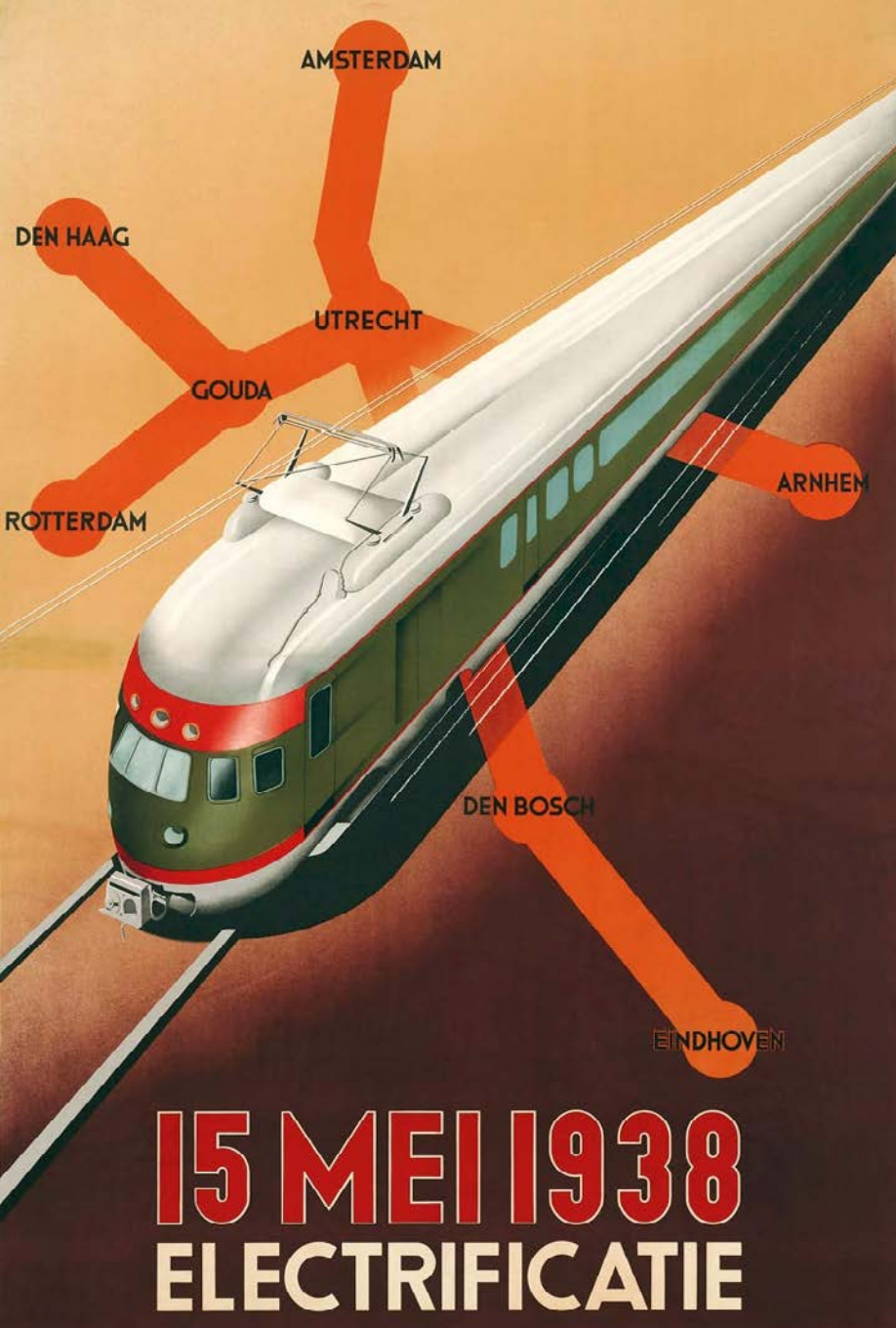
Kees van der Laan

"He has undoubtedly learned a lot from Cassandre, but has proved to be an artistic and intelligent pupil," Cornelis Veth wrote in a Dutch newspaper about Kees van der Laan (1903-1983). This self-taught Dutchman had gained experience in Paris between 1924 and 1927. He designed posters for the Dutch Railways, the Zeeland Steamship Company, the National Flight Academy and Ford. Van der Laan was also an expressionist painter and sculptor.

On his poster for winter travel, image and text are neatly aligned. To the tagline *Safe, Quick, Economical* the word *Heated* was added. A train hurtles along trees warped by wind and speed. The glow of the locomotive in the night emphasizes the warmth inside the train. It was one of the last Dutch posters with a steam locomotive.



In 1939 the Zeeland Steamship Company, which closely cooperated with the Dutch Railways, built a new ship called SS Princess Beatrix. Kees van der Laan depicted this modern ship alongside the latest streamlined electric trainset. The text on the poster was printed separately for larger stations to show the right price and place of departure.

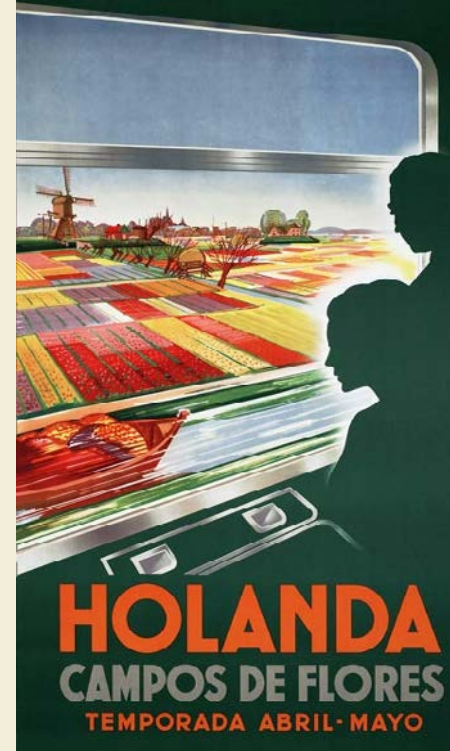


15 MEI 1938
ELECTRIFICATIE

Emmanuel Gaillard

The French Emmanuel Gaillard (1902-?) settled down in Amsterdam in 1927. He worked at Van Leer & Co printers as a poster designer for Philips, Van Nelle, large shipping companies and the Dutch Railways. In 1939 he would return to France to focus mainly on cinema posters.

In 1938 Gaillard designed a poster to mark the completion of the electrification of the so-called central network. It linked the main Dutch cities on a regular timetable and had Utrecht as its center. Depicted is the streamlined electrical trainset Mat 36, which was essential for this network. The fading towards the back indicates speed.



Gaillard also designed tourism posters. Around 1936 he created the popular Bulb Time poster for the Netherlands Board of Tourism, released in many languages. Although it was not commissioned by the Dutch Railways, the framing in a train window still makes it a railway poster. The modern trainset interior contrasted nicely with the picturesque landscape.

TREK ER OP UIT



MET EEN

Weekendretour

Frans Mettes

Venture out with a weekend ticket, ran the appeal by the Dutch Railways as designed by Frans Mettes (1909-1984). The posters by this self-taught designer are recognizable by their strong composition and striking use of color. Especially after the war his work for Heineken, Belinda, Ritmeester, KLM and the Dutch Railways would become iconic. He became the most prolific Dutch poster maker.

The Dutch Advertising Revue of 1939, however, judged the weekend ticket poster "a bit too colorful" and thought the landscape behind the window was more Belgian than Dutch! "Moreover, in our opinion it would have been commendable to keep the figures of the two travelers more muffled," the magazine wrote.

MET DE REGELMAAT VAN EEN UURWERK



On another railway poster by Frans Mettes from the same period a streamlined dieselelectric trainset passes through a clock face. It advertised the fixed timetable, which the Dutch Railways introduced in the late 30s: hourly trains on all lines of the central network. The trains ran with the regularity of clockwork.



ÉÉN TROOST M'NEER...!

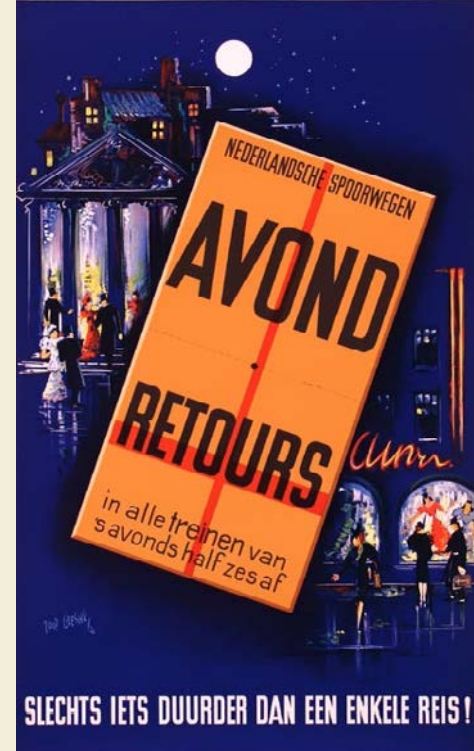
ZE GAAN NU ELK HALF UUR

VAN 15 MEI AF
EINDHOVEN - UTRECHT } AMSTERDAM
ARNHEM - UTRECHT } DEN HAAG
AMSTERDAM - HAARLEM - DEN HAAG
ROTTERDAM - DORDRECHT

Joop Geesink

The electrification of the central network enabled a strictly regular timetable. After an hourly service a half-hourly service was introduced by the summer of 1939. Joop Geesink (1913-1984) created a humorous poster for the occasion. A traveler arrives in a hurry and misses the train. A newspaper vendor at the platform shouts at him: "One consolation, Sir... They run every half hour now!".

Advertising man Joop Geesink had started his career as a set designer and later became known for his animations and puppet films. His 1972 creation Loekie the Lion, a puppet animation serving as an intermezzo between television commercials, would become familiar to all Dutch.



SLECHTS IETS DUURDER DAN EEN ENKELE REIS!

The figures on the half-hourly service poster are caricatures, flexible as puppets, which makes Geesink's interest in animation already apparent. On a poster for evening tickets the designer proved his more naturalistic talent as well, depicting sophisticated theater public and shoppers. Central to the image is an Edmondson ticket.

EXTRA REDUCTIE



GEZINS-RETOURS

OOK VOOR KLEINE GEZELSCHAPPEN 5-9 PERS:

Frans Waslander

In the late 1930s the Dutch Railways introduced several tickets at attractive rates. After special evening, weekend and summer tickets the family ticket followed to meet the needs of large families to venture out.

"At first sight, one would like to add a subtitle to this poster: the mannequins on a journey," the Dutch Advertising Review wrote in 1939. This was not a negative remark as it was said to make the poster "powerful". In 1935 another magazine had called Frans Waslander (1913-1977) a promising young artist with a special technique. "He works with soft, light gradient tints and gives his work the charm of sophistication." Waslander was educated at the Amsterdam School of Applied Arts and had gained practical experience in England and Germany.

Second World War

In the early years of the war some railway posters were still issued, especially with practical messages and calls to passengers and staff. A poster by Herman Niigh, for example, reminded not to smoke and one by Joop Geesink called drivers not to stop without reason and thus save coal.

In the years following the war – the first Dutch railway poster was published again in November 1945 – designers mostly continued to work along the pictorial lines Frans Mettes had started.



Dutch railway posters of the 1930s



Special thanks to
[Van Sabben Poster Auctions](#)
and [Spoorwegmuseum](#) (Dutch
Railway Museum).

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- [Dutch Railway Posters by Fedde Weidema](#)



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