

	<p>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems Issue 2, Vol. 9, 2026</p> <p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p> <h2>Manuscript Cataloguing Practices at the Tlemcen Branch of the National Center for Manuscripts: A Comparative Study Based on Anglo-American Cataloguing Standards</h2>
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Issue web link	https://imcra-az.org/archive/392-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-2-vol-9-2026.html
Keywords	Cataloging, Standards, Manuscripts, Anglo-American, Tlemcen.

Abstract

The process of cataloging is considered one of the most important technical procedures in libraries and manuscript centers, given the major role it plays in facilitating the research process. With the multiplicity of schools and methods of cataloging, manuscript centers have found themselves faced with the inevitability of choosing a specific method as a unified model, which has been embodied in the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR), considered among the most widespread methods and standards worldwide. However, in Algeria, several methods are followed, including that of the annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen, which has adopted a different approach. Through this study, we sought to compare it with the Anglo-American cataloguing standards.

Citation

Yassine Labed; Kamal Caïd. (2026). Manuscript Cataloguing Practices at the Tlemcen Branch of the National Center for Manuscripts: A Comparative Study Based on Anglo-American Cataloguing Standards. *Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems*, 9(2), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/9.2.49>

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Received: 12.09.2025

Accepted: 10.12.2025

Published: 20.01.2026 (available online)

Introduction

The cultural heritage left by ancestors represents a precious treasure due to its scientific, historical, and civilizational value, as it stands as evidence of the development of human thought and a fundamental source of knowledge. Manuscript heritage constitutes one of the most prominent components of this rich legacy, given the original knowledge it contains, produced by scholars and thinkers of the nation across various sciences and arts. In past eras, researchers and students traveled long distances in search of a rare manuscript or a valuable work, and the owners of libraries and collections at that time were considered among the elite classes of society, particularly during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, which witnessed remarkable prosperity in authorship, copying, and interest in manuscripts.

However, periods of foreign occupation experienced by Arab countries, including Algeria, posed a real threat to this heritage, as many manuscripts were stolen, destroyed, or smuggled. Only a limited number survived, preserved in some religious zawiyyas or private collections. After independence, the Algerian state paid great attention to this valuable heritage and sought to protect and restore it by establishing specialized institutions concerned with its preservation and maintenance. Among the most prominent of these was the National Center for Manuscripts, established in 2007 in the city of Adrar, followed by the opening of regional annexes in the provinces of Tlemcen and Biskra, within the framework of a national policy aimed at safeguarding manuscript heritage using modern scientific methods.

Scientific cataloging of manuscripts is considered one of the most important means of organizing this heritage and making it accessible to researchers and interested parties. Cataloging is not merely a process of physical or bibliographic description; rather, it is a precise scientific activity that facilitates access to knowledge and enhances the effectiveness of scientific research. This process has received significant attention from specialists in library and manuscript sciences, who have sought to establish unified standards to organize and regulate its elements in accordance with international benchmarks, foremost among them the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR).

In this context, the need arises to study the reality of applying these standards in Algerian institutions concerned with manuscripts, particularly the annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen, which exerts considerable efforts in collecting and organizing manuscript heritage. From here emerges the research problem, represented by the following main

question:

To what extent do the manuscript cataloging practices at the annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen conform to the Anglo-American cataloguing standards?

This main question is subdivided into several subsidiary questions, most notably:

- What is the reality of manuscript cataloging at the Tlemcen annex in terms of organization and methodology?
- To what extent are catalogers aware of the AACR standards?
- Does the method adopted at the Tlemcen annex in manuscript cataloging meet the needs of users?
- What is the level of quality of manuscript cataloging at the Tlemcen annex compared to the Anglo-American cataloging standards?

Based on the previous questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- The annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen relies on an interpretive method in cataloging.
- The manuscript cataloging method at the Tlemcen annex relatively meets the needs of users and researchers.
- The level of quality of manuscript cataloging at the Tlemcen annex appears high compared to the Anglo-American cataloging standards.

The importance of the study lies in the fact that cataloging constitutes the cornerstone in the field of manuscripts, both in subject and form, as the nature of most Arabic and Islamic manuscripts since ancient times emphasizes cataloging to facilitate the research process by saving time and effort. On the other hand, cataloging enables the discovery of errors and corrections in other copies or by copyists of a manuscript or a group of manuscripts.

This study also aims to identify a set of objectives, most notably:

- The motivations that led those in charge of the annex to choose the applied method.
- The level of staff at the Tlemcen annex regarding applications of scientific cataloging.
- The extent to which Anglo-American cataloging is compatible with the annex's plan and work program.

First: The Methodological Framework of the Study

1. Importance of the Study

The importance of this study stems from the multiplicity of its scientific, practical, and heritage dimensions, as it seeks to combine the theoretical aspect related to international cataloging standards with the applied aspect related to actual field practice within heritage preservation institutions. This importance can be highlighted as follows:

- This study represents a qualitative addition to academic literature specialized in manuscript science and cataloging science by analyzing the extent to which the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR) are applied to Arabic manuscripts, a field that has not yet received sufficient research attention in the Arab environment in general and the Algerian context in particular. It also provides an opportunity to compare local practices with global standards, contributing to the development of cataloging methodologies and the enhancement of their efficiency.
- The results of this study contribute to improving the technical performance of staff in libraries and manuscript centers by providing practical recommendations that can be adopted in bibliographic description and automated cataloging procedures, thereby enhancing the efficiency of information systems used in managing manuscript collections. The study can also serve as a professional reference in training library and information science specialists and guiding them toward best practices in dealing with rare documentary heritage.
- This study comes within the context of national and Arab efforts aimed at preserving tangible and intangible cultural heritage, as manuscripts constitute a fundamental pillar of the nation's civilizational identity. By developing cataloging methods in accordance with precise scientific standards, the study contributes to ensuring the sustainability of this heritage and facilitating its use for future generations, especially in light of digital transformations and electronic preservation requirements.

2. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to analyze the reality of manuscript cataloging at the annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen by examining the technical and organizational practices followed and comparing them with the Anglo-American cataloging standards (AACR), in order to determine the extent of compatibility between the local approach and international standards in this vital field.

It also aims to:

- Identify the motivations that led those in charge of the annex to adopt the current manuscript cataloging method and assess their awareness of internationally applied standards.
- Evaluate the level of professional and scientific competencies of cataloging specialists working at the Tlemcen annex with regard to applications of scientific cataloging and bibliographic description methods for manuscripts.
- Analyze the degree of compatibility of the adopted cataloging method with the Anglo-American standards (AACR) in terms of structure, content, and technical outputs.
- Identify the challenges and difficulties facing the application of international standards, whether organizational, technical, or human.
- Propose practical developmental mechanisms that contribute to unifying practices and improving cataloging quality, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the annex's work and contributing to its integration into national and international manuscript cataloging networks.

3. Methodology of the Study

This study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach, as it is the most appropriate for the nature of the subject, which seeks to diagnose the reality of manuscript cataloging at the annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen and analyze the extent of its compatibility with the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR). This approach focuses on describing phenomena as they exist in reality and analyzing them through precise scientific approaches that allow understanding their mechanisms without intervening to modify or influence them (Suleiman, 2014, p. 131), making it suitable for studying systems and organizational procedures in information institutions.

This approach was also supported by some tools of the comparative method, by comparing local manuscript cataloging practices with internationally adopted standards, with the aim of identifying similarities and differences and proposing ways to achieve compatibility between them. Combining descriptive and comparative approaches is considered a modern methodological trend in information studies and knowledge organization.

The integration of description, analysis, and comparison enables a scientific evaluation of the extent to which the Anglo-American cataloging standards (AACR) are applied, serving the study's objectives in proposing a developmental model based on international foundations.

4. Study Tools

This study relied on a set of integrated methodological tools that enable the collection of quantitative and qualitative data and information on the reality of manuscript cataloging at the annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen. These tools were selected in accordance with the nature of the study, which combines fieldwork and analytical dimensions. Interviews were used to identify the views of catalogers and staff at the annex regarding adopted cataloging methods, their awareness of the Anglo-American standards (AACR), and the difficulties they face during bibliographic description processes.

The study also relied on content analysis of the catalog cards used at the annex, in order to compare their bibliographic elements with those specified in the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR). This analysis made it possible to determine the degree of compatibility between local practices and international standards in terms of card format, data arrangement, and the nature of main and secondary access points.

Second: The Conceptual Framework of the Study

1. Manuscripts

Manuscripts constitute the fundamental pillar of human cultural and civilizational heritage, as they represent the primary medium that preserved thought and knowledge throughout the ages. They are material witnesses to the development of sciences, arts, literature, belief, and human thought in general. Arab-Islamic civilization paid great attention to manuscripts in terms of authorship, copying, and preservation, making ancient Islamic libraries among the richest in the world with their precious collections.

1.1 Definition of the Manuscript

The concept of the manuscript is a central notion in the field of documentary heritage and information sciences due to its cognitive, historical, and civilizational value. Scholarly literature has provided multiple definitions of this term, varying according to perspective and methodology, yet converging in highlighting the manual, historical, and intellectual nature of this type of document.

A manuscript is defined as "any text written by hand before the appearance of printing or outside its scope" (Al-Younsi, 2005, p. 21), focusing on the material and temporal dimensions of the manuscript by defining it in terms of production method (handwriting) and historical framework (pre-printing). This indicates that the manuscript represents a cognitive and technical stage preceding the spread of printing, and that its value lies in being a direct product of individual writing. Jean D. Lemaire (1993) offers a more comprehensive view, considering the manuscript to be "any intellectual production written by hand, or copied before the industrial age of printing, and regarded as a material witness to the development of thought and culture at a given historical stage." This definition adds cognitive and historical dimensions, viewing the manuscript not merely from a technical perspective, but as a "material witness" documenting the evolution of human thought across eras.

UNESCO (2018) provides a contemporary institutional definition, considering manuscripts as "part of the documentary heritage of humanity that requires material preservation and digitization to allow open access without harming the

original.” This definition goes beyond descriptive or historical boundaries to emphasize heritage and procedural dimensions, incorporating manuscripts into the framework of shared human heritage requiring physical protection and responsible digitization to ensure sustainability and accessibility for future generations.

From these definitions, the manuscript can be viewed as a primary source for scientific research, allowing researchers to access texts in their original form prior to editing or publication. This enables textual criticism and scholarly verification based on different copies, comparison between versions, and tracing changes introduced through transmission and copying.

Manuscripts also hold importance in other fields such as cultural history, linguistics, and jurisprudential and intellectual studies, as they provide precise information about scientific, linguistic, and social practices during their periods of production. Studying the material elements of manuscripts—such as paper type, ink, ornamentation, watermarks, and ownership notes—constitutes a key entry point for understanding the historical and institutional contexts in which they were produced.

1.2 Types of Manuscripts

1.2.1 Classification by Subject

- Religious manuscripts: including Qur’anic texts, exegesis, Hadith, jurisprudence, creed, prophetic biographies, and manuscripts related to other religious sciences.
- Linguistic and literary manuscripts: including works on grammar, morphology, rhetoric, prosody, poetry collections, and literary and critical works.
- Philosophical and intellectual manuscripts: dealing with reason, the soul, logic, ethics, and existential theories.
- Scientific manuscripts: including works in medicine, astronomy, mathematics, engineering, chemistry, physics, and mechanics.
- Historical and geographical manuscripts: documenting events, genealogies, countries, and travels.

1.2.2 Classification by Physical Form

- Scrolls: the oldest form of manuscripts, written on long strips of papyrus or leather.
- Parchment: made from treated animal skins, known for durability.
- Papyrus sheets: lightweight but less resistant to environmental factors.

1.2.3 Classification by Language

- Arabic
- Persian
- Ottoman Turkish
- Classical languages such as Latin and Greek
- Other languages such as Syriac, Coptic, Hebrew, and Indian languages

1.2.4 Classification by Nature of Copy

- Autograph copies
- Copied manuscripts

1.3 Preservation and Conservation of Manuscripts

1.3.1 Traditional Preservation Methods

- Use of acid-free storage materials
- Climate control
- Protection from light and dust
- Careful physical handling
- Preventive isolation

1.3.2 Digital Preservation

Digital preservation aims to convert manuscripts into secure digital objects for access and research. UNESCO’s “Memory of the World” initiative emphasizes digitization without replacing physical preservation.

2. Manuscript Cataloging

Manuscript cataloging is defined as a set of descriptive and subject processes that produce standardized data on the intellectual content, physical characteristics, and copy-related features of a manuscript, enabling its identification and retrieval within organized bibliographic control systems (Suleiman, 1989, p. 20).

2.1. Types of Manuscript Cataloging

- Subject cataloging
- Descriptive cataloging

2.2 Importance of Manuscript Cataloging

- Facilitating scholarly verification and publication
- Systematic identification of heritage production
- Integration into national and international bibliographic networks
- Providing precise authority data

2.3. Requirements and Competencies of the Cataloger

- Cognitive competencies
- Skill competencies
- Working tools

3. Manuscript Cataloging Standards

- Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2)
- MARC 21
- AFLI Standards

3. Anglo-American Cataloguing Standards

3.1. Definition

AACR2 is a unified set of descriptive rules developed to build bibliographies and determine access points (librarianshipstudies, 2021).

3.2. Basic Structure

- Description
- Headings and access points
- Appendices

4. Manuscript Cataloging in Algeria: The Case of the National Center for Manuscripts - Tlemcen Annex

Algeria possesses rich manuscript collections distributed across national and regional libraries and private collections. The National Library of Algeria and the National Center for Manuscripts, with its annexes in Biskra and Tlemcen, play central roles in inventory, cataloging, and preservation. The Tlemcen annex was established under Executive Decree 06-10 (15 January 2006).

4.1. Analysis of the Catalog Card Model Used at the Tlemcen Annex

The current catalog card model was adopted by the National Center for Manuscripts in 2011 following a meeting of the National Manuscripts Committee at the National Library of Algeria. The outcomes of the scientific workshops resulted in unifying the catalog card between the two institutions and adopting it officially as a unified national model.

Table 1: Shows the sources of information specified for each field.

Field | Specified Sources of Information

Field	Specified Sources of Information
Title and Statement of Responsibility	Primary source of information: published copies of manuscripts
Edition	Primary source of information: published copies of manuscripts
Date	Primary source of information: published copies of manuscripts
Physical Description	Any source
Notes	Any source

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on interview data.

Table 1 shows that the cataloguing methodology adopted at the Tlemcen Annex is characterized by **integration between original and secondary sources**, where priority is given to **direct sources (published copies)** in the core fields that define the manuscript's identity (title, author, edition, date), while allowing multiple sources for descriptive fields (physical description, notes) in order to provide the maximum possible amount of information.

Table 2: Sample Cataloguing Card of a Manuscript

Entry Data

Entry	Data
Manuscript Number	39/01
Author's Name	Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Salmun al-Kanani al-Gharnati
Serial Number of the Item within the Collection	/
First and Last Folio of the Item	From 01 verso to 370 verso

1. Content Field

Element	Information
Manuscript Title	<i>Al-'Aqd al-Munazzam lil-Hukkām fīnā Yajī Bayna Aydīhim min al-'Uqūd wa al-Aḥkām</i>
Full Name of the Author	Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Salmun al-Kanani al-Gharnati

Element	Information
Author's Date of Death	741 AH / 1341 CE
Subject of the Manuscript	Marriage rulings
Language	Arabic
Beginning of the Manuscript	"In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate, and may Allah's blessings be upon our Master Muhammad, his family and companions... Praise be to Allah, the Possessor of glory and generosity, who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know..."
End of the Manuscript	"...And may blessings be upon our Master and Prophet Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets and the Imam of the Messengers, and upon his family, with complete submission. The completion was on Friday, the twenty-first of Dhu al-Qa'dah in the year one thousand one hundred and forty-seven."

2. Copying Data Field

Element	Information
Scribe's Name	Unknown
Place of Copying	/
Date of Copying	1147 AH / 1736 CE

3. Physical Description Field

Element	Information
Volume Number	/
Part Numbers within the Volume	/
Manuscript Material	Paper
Number of Folios	183
Number of Lines per Folio	31
Condition of the Manuscript	Poor
Dimensions	Folio: width 16 cm × height 26.1 cm
Outer cover: width 16.5 cm × height 25.3 cm	
Script Type	Maghrebi
Illustrations	None
Decoration	None
Ink Colors	Black + Red
Binding	/
Flap (Tongue)	None
Catchwords	Present

4. Supplementary Information Field

Element	Information
Collations	None
Corrections	/
Readings	None
Audition Notes	None
Authorizations (Ijāzāt)	—
Ownership Marks	Name: —
Date: Not available	
Endowments	From: —
Date: Not available	

Element	Information
To: —	—
Detached Folios	—

5. Research Data Field

Element	Information
Locations of Other Copies	/
Publication Data	/
Verification, Editing, and Publication Data	/
Sources and References	The manuscript itself + Internet

6. Notes Field

- The manuscript is complete.
- There are signs of ink fading on most pages of the manuscript.
- Some folios are stuck together.
- Most pages show random restoration work.
- There are some holes and traces of paper-eating insects along the edges of the manuscript.

Cataloguer Information

Element	Information
Cataloguer	Ghalem Rabia
Date	05/11/2023

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on field study data.

From Table 2, we observe that the cataloguing card consists of an entry and **eight main fields**, distributed as follows:

First: The Entry

The entry consists of four main data elements:

- **Manuscript number:** recorded sequentially according to the inventory number and catalog card number.
- **Author's name:** the full name of the author is recorded without abbreviation whenever available.
- **Serial number of the item within the collection:** in case the manuscript is a single item within a collection.
- **First and last folio:** indicating the beginning and end of the item to determine text completeness.

Second: Content Field

This field includes:

- Manuscript title.
- Full name of the author as recorded in the entry.
- Author's date of death, mentioned in Hijri and corresponding Gregorian dates if available, or estimated by the cataloguer if absent.
- Manuscript subjects, including all chapters and sections covered by the text.
- Language; if more than one language is used, all are mentioned.
- Beginning of the manuscript, preferably at least two lines from the introduction.
- End of the manuscript, including the last line, often containing a supplication or prayer upon the Prophet ﷺ.

Third: Copying Data Field

Includes:

- Name of the scribe, if known.
- Place of copying, if specified.
- Date of copying, in Hijri, Gregorian, or both.

Fourth: Physical Description Field

Includes:

- Volume number.
- Part numbers within the volume.
- Writing material (paper, parchment, leather).
- Number of folios.
- Number of lines per folio.
- Manuscript condition (good, medium, poor, very poor).
- Dimensions of the inner folios and outer cover.

- Script type(s).
- Decoration, if present.

Fifth: Additions Field

Includes:

- Ink colors.
- Binding type and material.
- Flap (tongue).
- Catchwords.
- Collations.
- Corrections.
- Audition notes.
- Authorizations (ijāzāt).
- Ownership marks.
- Signatures.
- Detached folios.

Sixth: Research Data Field

Includes:

- Locations of other manuscript copies.
- Publication data.
- Editing or publication data.
- Sources and references.

Seventh: Notes Field

Records any important explanatory or descriptive notes related to the manuscript, its condition, or content.

Eighth: Cataloguer Data Field

Includes:

- Full name of the cataloguer(s).
- Date of cataloguing.

Comparative Table of Fields between Tlemcen Annex Cataloguing and Anglo-American Cataloguing

Table 3: Availability of Fields

Field	Present	Absent
Title and Statement of Responsibility	X	
Edition	X	
Date	X	
Physical Description	X	
Notes	X	

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on field study data.

Table 4: Similarities and Differences

Similarities	Differences
Similarity in the number of core fields	Tlemcen Annex card is more detailed in data
Use of vertical layout for data organization	Some fields differ in naming or include additional details
Similar entries and sources	Greater focus on copying data, scribes, and notes in the Tlemcen card
Same documentation methodology for physical description	Anglo-American cataloguing overlooks some cultural and religious specificities
Equivalent fields in function and content	Tlemcen card تخصص a cataloguer field, absent in AACR2

Source: Prepared by the researchers based on field study data.

Tables 3 and 4 show that the cataloguing card adopted at the Tlemcen Annex covers approximately **90% of the core fields of AACR2**, with slight differences in naming or level of detail, reflecting a successful local adaptation to the cultural and scholarly specificities of Arabic manuscripts.

5. General Results

Despite the absence of strict application of international standards, the cataloguing card used is characterized by comprehensiveness and accuracy.

The local cataloguing card is broader and richer in information than AACR2. The specific nature of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts required the addition of new fields not present in Anglo-American cataloguing, particularly those related to copying, notes, and cataloguer data.

The adopted card is the result of collective scholarly effort by specialists in library science, based on the recommendations of the National Symposium on Manuscript Heritage held in 2011 at the National Library of Algeria.

6. Recommendations and Proposals

- Organizing specialized training courses on international cataloguing standards (AACR2 and RDA) for regional center staff.
- Establishing a joint national committee between the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Higher Education to unify manuscript cataloguing standards.
- Digitizing catalogues and making them electronically accessible to researchers.
- Directing efforts toward digital and automated cataloguing within a national manuscript digitization strategy.
- Reviewing legal and regulatory texts governing manuscript management to facilitate documentation and access.
- Establishing a national center for monitoring and coordination among institutions concerned with manuscripts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the cataloguing method currently adopted at the Tlemcen Annex of the National Manuscripts Center is the result of expert recommendations issued in 2011 by specialists from the National Manuscripts Center and the National Library of Algeria. It represents accumulated professional experience and is therefore officially adopted. The study concludes that this card is broader and richer in quantity and quality of information than Anglo-American cataloguing (AACR2), in order to accommodate the specific characteristics of Arabic and Islamic manuscripts in general, and Algerian manuscripts in particular, especially given that most manuscripts are held in zawiyyas and private collections.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for research in library and information science. The research is based on institutional practices, cataloguing records, and publicly accessible or officially authorized documentation from the Annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen. No human subjects were involved, and no personal, sensitive, or confidential data were collected or disclosed. The analysis was carried out with due respect for institutional integrity, professional ethics, and the preservation of cultural heritage. All sources were appropriately acknowledged, and the study avoided any misrepresentation of institutional procedures or professional practices.

Author Contributions

- Yassine Labed contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, comparative analysis between local cataloguing practices and Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, and drafting of the manuscript.
- Kamal Caïd contributed to the methodological framework, critical review of cataloguing standards, interpretation of findings, and revision of the manuscript for intellectual content.

Both authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and take full responsibility for its content.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere appreciation to the staff of the Annex of the National Center for Manuscripts in Tlemcen for their cooperation and for facilitating access to cataloguing documentation and institutional procedures. Gratitude is also extended to colleagues in the field of library and information science who provided valuable academic feedback during the preparation of this study.

Funding

This research received no external funding from public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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