# **The Popular Horse:** From army and agriculture to leisure

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”You can’t hang a man for killing a woman, trying to steal his horse.” Det finns flera slags fascination för hästar. En handlar om hästens roll i den amerikanska ”vilda västern”; så viktiga var hästar att man hängde hästtjuvar, eller som i citatet från Willie Nelsons ”Redheaded Stranger”, att man ostraffat kunde döda för att skydda sin häst. Ett annat slags fascination beskrivs av C. G. Jung; hos honom har hästen en given plats i vårt kollektiva undermedvetna, och relationen till hästen kan ibland kompensera bristen på meningsfulla relationer med andra människor. I Sverige används hästskötsel i terapeutiskt syfte på ett behandlingshem för sexuellt utnyttjade flickor; här representerar hästen livet, det friska, pålitliga. Feminister förklarar flickors och kvinnors dragning till hästlivet med att det är fritt från pojkar och män, det är numera (nästan) ett kvinnorum där tjejer kan slita och smutsa ned sig utan att samtidigt behöva upprätthålla traditionell kvinnlighet. Och i flera undersökningar visas att ”hästtjejer” är modigare, de blir bättre ledare, de tar större ansvar – de har lärt sig att tygla makten.

I Sverige finns idag ca 300 000 hästar, en del engagerade i olika hästsporter, men i huvudsak verksamma inom fritidssektorn, och därtill som sagt också inom vården, om än i begränsad utsträckning. För bara 60 år sedan var praktiskt taget alla hästar i landet sysselsatta inom skogs- och jordbruket, transportsektorn och kavalleriet. Vad som har hänt sedan dess är i stora drag känt; den tekniska utvecklingen av transport- och kommunikationsmedel har helt onödiggjort hästen som arbetsdjur. Under samma tid har hästen blivit en angelägenhet för kvinnor i första hand, från att tidigare nästan exklusivt ha ingått i mannens domän. Dessa två utvecklingsspår, hästens väg från jordbruket och armén till fritidssektorn, och från manlig angelägenhet till kvinnlig, ska undersökas i ett treårigt forskningsprojekt, ”Folkhemshästen – från arbetskamrat till fritidsnöje” (Vetenskapsrådet). Susanna Hedenborg är projektledare, och i sin artikel presenterar hon de teoretiska och metodologiska utgångspunkterna för studien.

## Introduction

The aim of the project *The popular horse – from army and agriculture to leisure* is to map out and explain the changing role of the horse in Swedish society from 1945 to 2000. The horse industry has changed dramatically during this period. In 1945 the horse was important to agriculture, forestry, transports and the army. Today the horse industry is focused on sport and leisure activities – not least on leisure activities for children and young people, and in a new way for agriculture, tourism and the environment. In this article an outline of the project is presented.

Important questions for the research project are how and why equestrian sports have become popular sports in Sweden, and how and why there has been a change of gender connected to these sports; from being masculine sports, equestrian sports today are connected to femininity. A hypothesis is that the Swedish government has played an important role in the creation of equestrian sports as a popular sport, through substantial economic support. Another hypothesis is that when work in the army, farming, forestry and transportation – four masculine settings in which horses were previously of great importance – became less dependent on horses, women had an opportunity to enter into the horse industry.

In order to discover how the development of the horse industry has been treated in politics, public reports connected to this issue will be examined. However, the project is not only interested in the political texts in relation to horses. Rather, research will be carried out on several levels in society: public policies; the national institutions for the breeding of horses and education about horses; educational and research texts on horses and the equestrian organisations; riding schools and a local area in which horses are used.[1] In addition to other text sources and questionnaires, statistical and oral sources will also be used.

1 Public policies concerning the horses and their role in society will be studied in public investigations and reports, the agreements between the government and the ATG (the company for totalisator gambling), and through interviews.

Public policies will also be studied in relation to the three national institutions for the horse industry: Wångens, Flyinge och Strömsholm as well as the constitution of Nationella Stiftelsen för Hästhållningens Främjande (The national foundation for the Swedish horse sector). In this study the institutions and their changing roles will be focused on – the actual institutions and the conditions they work under respectively. Which actors have been behind the changes and which questions have been the most important? Both the actors and questions will be analysed from gender and generational perspectives. In order to study this interviews and protocols are used as source materials.

Today many people grow up far from the countryside and with no animals close by. Therefore, people are not socialised into taking care of animals. It is likely that this development has led to that the national institutions concerned with horse issues have become increasingly important as institutions of education in this field. In this study governmental debate, educational texts and research material will be used as well as interviews with teachers and students.

The equestrian organisations have a history of about 100 years. Riding schools and their students are closely connected to the changes in the organisations. For a study of this development protocols and yearly statistics will be used, as well as interviews.

The way in which public policies are realised in practice will be studied in two riding schools and in one region. In the study of the riding schools, interviews will be the most important source material and in the regional study a questionnaire will be used. The study of the region is aimed at answering questions about the ownership of private horses and companies developed regionally to provide for the needs of these owners.

## The economic importance of horses

The interest for the horse is great in contemporary Sweden. There are about 300 000 horses in the country, and Sweden is one of the countries in Europe with the greatest number of horses per capita (see Table 1).[2] In that way Sweden is different from France, Germany and Great Britain in which the horse industry has been of less importance. 40 years ago nobody could have anticipated that the number of horses was going to increase this much in Sweden, since the number of horses had decreased since the 1940s from 600 000[3] to scarcely 60 000[4] in the 1970s.

**Table 1.** *Number of horses per 1000 people in 1998*

| Country | Number of horses | Number of horses per 1000 people |
|---|---|---|
| Germany | 700000 | 8,537 |
| Sweden | 300000[5] | 33 |
| Gr Britain | 200000 | 3,333 |
| Ireland | 100000 | 25 |
| Belgium | 100000 | 10 |
| Denmark | 100000 | 18,182 |
| Italy | 10000 | 0,172 |
| Austria | 10000 | 1,25 |
| Finland | 50000 | ,10 |
| Norway | 50000 | ,10 |

Source: SOU 2000:109, 258–259;
http://www.sjv.se/download/18.7502f61001ea08a0c7fff102034/hastar.PDF 2007-11-13

The number of horses is not only immense – the horse industry generates great economic returns. The turnover in the horse industry amounts to more than SEK 18 billion every year, 11 billions of which come from totalisator betting on horse racing. Moreover, the industry creates numerous work opportunities. In Sweden the horse industry generates about 10 000 full time occupations or about 30 000 part time occupations. Additionally, horse owners have become an important consumer group and in this way even more occupations connected to the horse industry are generated: growing and selling fodder for horses has become the fourth most important income for farmers; an increasing number of shops concentrated on selling things related to horse riding, e. g. clothes, saddles, snaffles, halters, covers, etcetera, have been established; and the number of horse riding events, to which it is possible to buy relatively expensive tickets, is growing.

2 JO 24 SM 0501

3 SOU 1946:45. It is not only the actual number of horses that has changed. During the former part of the 20th century the horses were of a heavier type and were first and foremost used as draught animals, whereas today's horses are of a lighter type and used for horse riding.

4 Ds Jo 1982:51

5 The number is for 2007, and is estimated. 1998 there were 225 000 horses in Sweden, the equivalent of 25 horses per capita.

Equestrian sports influence society in other ways as well. For instance they are among the most popular sports and leisure activities for people and there are about 216 000 members of the Swedish Equestrian sports organisation. Additionally, it is estimated that approximately one million people are involved in equestrian sports, e g as riders, owners of horses and as parents taking their children to and from riding lessons. Bringing all those factors together it is obvious that the horse industry is an important part of contemporary Swedish society. However, the questions of how and why are yet to be answered.

## To explain the changing importance of the horse industry

Despite the growing interest in horses, few social and historical studies of the horse and work around the horse have been produced in Sweden.[6] In international research the horse sector has played a somewhat larger role, especially flat racing.[7] An explanation of why equestrian sports have achieved so little attention is maybe, as pointed out by the British economic historian Joyce Kay[8], a consequence of the gender and age of the majority of the participants today. In Sweden 84 percent of the 215 000 members in the Swedish Equestrian Society are women, and 65 percent are below the age of 25 years.[9] Well-known facts are that the history of female occupation and of childhood are areas less researched than male occupation and men's history.

Today, horse riding has acquired a feminine gender code and is strongly connected to young girls. A hundred years ago a real man was a "horseman" and masculinity was connected to horse riding. (Photo: Susanna Hedenborg)

6 An exception is Britt Liljewall & Janken Myrdal, red, *Arbetshästen under 200 år*, 1997. Another exception is the book *I sulky och sadel* in which horse racing and harness racing is discussed. Mats Greiff & Susanna Hedenborg, *I sulky och sadel*, 2007. In this book (and in Hedenborg forthcoming) an outline on previous research on the horse industry is presented.

7 Among others; Wray Vamplew, *The turf: A social and Economic History of Horse racing*, 1976; Carole Case, *Down the backstretch. Racing and the American Dream*, 1991: Fergus D'Arcy, *Horses, lords and racing men. The turf Club 1790–1990*, 1991; Mark Huggins, *Flat racing and British society*, 2000; Wray Vamplew & Joyce Kay, *Encyclopaedia of British horse racing*, 2003.

8 Stated at the ISHPES conference in Copenhagen in 2007

9 SOU 2000:109, 49–50.

In order to explain the changing importance of the horse industry, several factors have to be studied. To begin with, it is likely that public support of the horse industry is of great importance – the question of how big this importance is will be mapped out and discussed within the project. Even now it is obvious that a significant source of income that has been used to cover this support is gambling. However, the arguments for this support and for the continuation of the support are yet to be examined. A few likely arguments for the public support of the horse industry will be mapped out and discussed below.

Firstly, it is possible that arguments for the support of the horse industry are connected to the support of other sports. Public support has been given to the sports movement during the 20th century. The Swedish sports model, which is constituted by a strong central organisation and public support, has been different from sports models in other Western European countries where the sports organisations have been more numerous and where the market forces have been essential.[10] In the same way as the idea of the Swedish welfare state with a universal or general reach has been of importance to the development of the care and service sector[11], it has been of consequence to sport politics. An interesting subject for this project is why Social Democratic governments (which were in power most of the studied period) chose to support a sport that many people connected to the upper classes.[12]

Secondly, during the last 20 years the Swedish welfare state model has been challenged and changed into another model in which market forces have become of greater significance. A similar development can be observed within sports, where processes of professionalization and commercialisation have had increasing importance. A central question for this project is whether a similar development can be observed in the horse industry and whether arguments connected to commercialisation and professionalization are used in the political texts connected to equestrian sports. It is clear that commercial trade and industry have been invited to participate as sponsors to, for example, horse riding events.[13] Whether these invitations have been of importance to the survival and development of the horse industry or whether public support has continued to be of a greater significance – both in ideology and in practice – has to be studied.

Thirdly, an additional explanation to the development of the horse industry could be that this industry, in a similar way to that of the agricultural sector, has been given support in order to make the nation self-supporting on horses.[14] The national need for horses can, in that case, also be connected to an imagined need of a national defence built on horses, and a concern for the difficulties that could arise in connection to the import of oil and fuel. This factor can explain the public support of the horse industry in the beginning of the period, but why was the support given in the latter part of the period when the concerns about the supply of oil and fuel diminished?

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10 For a categorisation of the Swedish sport model see among others, Johan Norberg, *Idrottens väg till folkhemmet. Studier i statlig idrottspolitik 1913-1970,* 2004

11 Lena Sommestad, ”Privat eller offentlig välfärd? : ett genusperspektiv på välfärdsstaternas historiska formering”, *Historisk tidskrift* 1994:4, in practice the universality of the model has been questioned, see among other Jenny Björkman, *Vård för samhällets bästa : debatten om tvångsvård i svensk lagstiftning 1850-1970,* 2001

12 For a long time harness racing had a popular connection, but to ride horses was not common in the Swedish countryside during the first part of the 20th century. Greiff & Hedenborg a.a.

13 Kurt Graaf, *Den svenska varmblodshästens historia under 200 år. 1800-2000*, 2004.

14 For the public support to the agricultural sector, see Iréne Flygare & Maths Isacson, *Det svenska jordbrukets historia. [Bd 5], Jordbruket i välfärdssamhället : 1945-2000,* 2003.

Fourthly, another explaining factor could be connected to the actions of the horse organisations. Did these organisations support the development of a horse industry?

Fifthly, besides the already discussed factors, the development of the horse industry could be connected to the changing roles of agriculture and of the countryside. Primarily, this change has influenced development in that the horse is important economically in other ways today in comparison to earlier on in history – from being important to agriculture, forestry and transports, to becoming important for leisure activities. Secondly, as less and less people grow up in the countryside close to animals, it is likely that the need for education has increased in these areas as an increasing number of people are interested in the taking care of horses. Questions concerning the changing economic importance and the changing educational needs are of importance to the project.

Horses were most often used as draught animals in the farming industry.
(Source: Familjen Piledahs klipparkiv, private archive.)

Sixthly, today children and young people are attracted to horses. Questions whether these groups always have been attracted, or whether a raised interest for horses from these groups can be connected to a general increased interest in sports are important to the study. It is also interesting to investigate whether public support and politics have worked in favour of the integration and exclusion of different age groups in the horse sector. When it comes to the parts of the horse industry that have been feminised, a gender perspective is necessary in order to examine whether any of these explaining factors are gender coded. Equestrian sports were traditionally connected to masculine areas in Sweden as well as in other countries. Up until recently men took care of horses and a real man was a “horseman”. In the agricultural society the horses in front of the plough were taken care of by men, while cows and poultry were the responsibilities of women. Horses were also found in other masculine milieus like the forestry and the transport sector, in which they were foremost used as draught animals.

The fourth masculine setting in which horses were found is the army. That a majority of the riders were connected to the army is seen in a book on horses and “horse people” in Sweden published in 1939. Rider’s biographies are presented and 57 percent of the male riders had a profession within the army – making this the largest group of riders.

In the army horses were ridden as well as used as draught animals. Officers in the cavalry had opportunities to compete and wore uniforms in competitions. (Source: Göran Demins fotografi, Stockholm, private ownership.)

Horse riding was also connected to the upper classes. Among the civilians, men connected to the higher echelons of the agricultural community amounted to 10 percent of all riders, and another important group also connected to the upper class, directors for companies, amounted to 7 percent.[15] It was primarily as members of the upper class that women were able to practise horse riding a hundred yeas ago.[16] That some women from the upper class had access these opportunities is documentet in the book on horses and "horse people" in Sweden mentioned above. According to the biographies written about riders in Sweden, 18 per cent of the riders were women.[17]

Today the gender of the "horseman" has changed in Sweden. Women (and girls) dominate the horse riding schools and this work is now seen as extremely feminine. Why? Very often, constructed female instincts – nurturing and caring – have been used as explanations of this development. Because of these instincts, women, more than men, like to take care of horses: ride them, brush them and muck out. Others suggest that women are tougher than

15 *Hästar och hästfolk*, 1939.

16 See Charles Chenevix Trench, C, *Ridkonstens historia*, LTs förlag, 1970, 272–290. The author also discusses problems for the female riders, like the side-saddle and the long dresses. To ride in a side-saddle and to mount and dismount was difficult and help was needed by grooms. How to overcome these difficulties was a subject for many pamphlets. Among others one which is connected to the opening for female riders of the Academy stable in Uppsala towards the end of the 1870's, Johan Georg Arsenius, *PM i ridkonsten. Upsala studenter tilegnad av deras stallmästare Johan Georg Arsenius,* 1885. (Thank you Kari Lawe for the tip on this essay) In August Strinbergs *Giftas* there is a problematisation of femininity and masculinity in connection to the female rider. Women who rode were both erotisised and masculinisised. Anna Cavallin, "'En lukt av brunstiga djur, svett och ammoniak'. August Strindbergs *Giftas* och ridkonsten" *Tidskrift för Litteraturvetare*, 2001: 4, 67–75.

17 *Hästar och hästfolk*, 1939.

men, and that explains why women take care of horses.[18] However, these answers are contradictory and impossible to use in order to explain a historical development. Are women more nurturing and caring today and have they simultaneously become tougher? And if they always have been both tougher and more caring, why have women not always taken care of horses? The answers are more complex and interesting than biological or psychological explanations suggest.

In order to explain why men and women work in different sectors, are connected to different leisure activities and sports and how and why masculine and feminine gender codes can change, a historical perspective is necessary. As previously demonstrated in connection to the increasing number of women in Swedish horse racing, it is important to study economic development, gender and social class coding of different occupations and men's support of women.[19] In connection to equestrian sport, similar studies are necessary. Furthermore, it is interesting to study whether the public policies have worked in favour of a feminisation; if changed economic importance of the horse within agriculture and the army have influenced the gender coding; if there are different occupations within the horse industry connected to gender; and whether the educational needs are connected to gender.

## Equestrian sport and the public reports

In this part of the article a brief discussion on what can be found in one of the public reports will demonstrate how these sources will be studied. In order to analyse the arguments used in the public reports – listed in Figure 1 – concerning the horse industry, a model for analysing the texts is needed. The model is developed in order to take into account all possible arguments for the support of the horse industry presented above.

When it comes to the question of how equestrian sports were treated on a governmental level it is obvious that up until 1945 equestrian sports were closely connected to the Swedish cavalry. During the 1940's and 1950's the decreasing number of horses was discussed in public reports and seen as a problem for the defence of the country. Several solutions were presented in the reports from this time.[20] In a public report from 1946 the question of how to ensure an adequate number of horses for the army in peace time was posed. It was stated that it was important that the army had a supply of available horses that could be used in case of war. However, the horses could not be kept in the army as the number of regular horses had to be decreased. In order to ensure a favourable development, economic support to private breeding was suggested. It was also underlined that two types of horses were of more use for the army than others. In agriculture, the Ardennes draught-horse had become more and more popular, but as this type of horse is heavy it was not seen as suitable for army use. Another popular type was the in-breeding of the Oldenburger-horse which was also seen as unsuitable. Instead it was suggested that breeders of the Swed-

18 Good examples of these contradictory explanations are found in a videofilm, which is supposed to inform young people of basic "horse knowledge". See *Börja rida: Filmen för dig som älskar hästar*, 2001.

19 Susanna Hedenborg, "Female Jockeys in Swedish Horse Racing 1890–2000. From Minority to Majority", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 2007: 4.

20 SOU 1946:45; SOU 1953:3.

ish half-bred and the north-Sweden horse needed economic support.[21] In the report it was emphasised that a good supply of horses was dependent on making it profitable for horse breeders to continue to breed horses. In order to ensure a sufficient supply of riding horses, the prize of young horses was to be raised and a reward for young horses sold to the army was to be paid.[22]

**Figure 1:** *Possible arguments in connection to the horse industry, as used in public reports 1946–2000. The existence of an argument is marked with an x. (SOU 1946:45 is used as an example of what an analysis would look like.)*

| Arguments relating to… | SOU 1946:45 | SOU 1953:3 | SOU 1961:01 | Jo 1964:2 | Ds Jo 1972:8 | Ds Jo 1981:6 | SOU 1982:51 | SOU 2000:109 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| …betting | X | | | | | | | |
| …public health | X | | | | | | | |
| …public support to sports | | | | | | | | |
| …commercialization of sports | | | | | | | | |
| …agricultural sector | X | | | | | | | |
| …the army | X | | | | | | | |
| …breeding | X | | | | | | | |
| …the equestrian organisations | X | | | | | | | |
| …the countryside as recreation | | | | | | | | |
| …popularity | X | | | | | | | |
| …gender | | | | | | | | |
| …generation | | | | | | | | |

Another question was that of demand: ithad decreased as the army did not need regular horses any more. A recommended way, in the report, to ensure a demand was to increase the number of horses that were taken out of service every year from 10 to 11 per cent. If this share was increased the army needed to buy more horses – about 50 more horses every year.[23]

An optional suggestion in order to ensure a good supply of available riding horses for the army was to keep the costs down for the caretaking of army horses. A recommended way was to lend them to people outside the army during time of peace. One of the equestrian organisations emphasised that there were a lot of people who could not afford their own horses but were interested in horse riding, and that they would surely agree to take care of an army horse if they were given some support.[24] An increasing interest for horse riding was commented in other ways as well and in order to increase the demand for riding horses furthermore, economic support was to be given to equestrian associations to make compe-

21 SOU 1946:45, 18–25.
22 SOU 1946:45, 33–35.
23 SOU 1946:45, 35–37.
24 SOU 1946:45, 38–40.

titions more popular: e. g. raising of prize money; giving the civil riders free trips on the national railway with their horses to competitions (just as the army officers had the right to travel for free to competitions)[25]; economic support to ensure horse shows[26]; and giving officers in the army a right to have their horses put up for free in army stables.[27]
Another important measure was to popularise horse riding. In the report it was stated that an increased interest for horse riding had been seen, even though horse riding was expensive. Particularly young people were interested. It was also emphasised that people with work which made them sit still too much, ought to practise horse riding as a means of physical exercise. It was said that companies had already arranged riding clubs for their staff – which was clearly supported in the report. In order to organise this, economic support to the building of mangès was the most important measure together with the establishment of a new equestrian organisation ensuring a broad base of riders – Ridfrämjandet.[28]

The breeding of horses was supported by the state. In the picture a family from the southern part of Sweden is posing together with their breeding horses – the Swedish half-bred. (Source: Familjen Piledahs klipparkiv, Stora Herrestad in Ystad, privately owned.)

The interest for public health was not exclusive to the horse riding discussion. It was actually wide spread in the public discourse after 1945. According to the sport organisations and the government, common people were more interested in their physical health during the inter-war years and the Second World War than afterwards. During this period several public health marches were organised and the possibility to achieve badges for different kinds of physical activities grew. In the 1950's a discussion on the physical inactivity of the population developed.[29] The discussions on the popularisation of horse riding were probably influenced by this wider discourse.

In total, the economic support to equestrian sport ought to be risen with 1.5 million Swedish crowns, according to the report. This represented an increase of 100 percent. An additional sum of 2.5 million crowns was supposed to be used in order to support the build-

25 SOU 1946:45, 42–44, 46
26 SOU 1946:45, 44–46
27 SOU 1946:45, 46–47.
28 SOU 1946:45, 56–64.
29 Hans Bolling, *Sin egen lyckas smed. Idéer, initiativ och organisationer inom svensk motionsidrott 1945–1981*, 2005; Johnny Wijk, *Idrott, krig och nationell gemenskap: om riksmarscher, fältsport och Gunder Hägg-feber*, 2005.

ing of manèges.[30] The economic support was primarily to be covered by the proceeds from gambling. When the totalisator for flat and harness racing was introduced in 1923, the most important argument was that money was needed to keep cavalry horses.[31] Obviously, this was still seen as an important way of spencing the money in 1946.

A popularisation of horse riding during times of peace was suggested in a public report from 1946 and was seen as a measure to increase the number of horses in Sweden, in order to guarantee a sufficient number of horses in case of war. (Source: Familjen Piledahs klipparkiv, Stora Herrestad in Ystad, privately owned.)

## Concluding remarks

The aim of this article has been to present an outline of a new research project, *The popular horse*. The project has recently been initiated following decisions of financial support by KSLA (Kungliga skogs- och lantbruksakademin [Royal Forestry and Farming Academy]) and VR (Vetenskapsrådet [Council of Science]), and it will run for three years. The questions that are posed, the model for analysing texts and the results connected to the public report from 1946 are preliminary. In forthcoming reports, more results will be presented. So far, the most obvious insight is that the horse industry is of great importance in contemporary Swedish society. Therefore, a study of it will be of great interest for people working in the industry, for academics in sport or leisure studies and researchers in social sciences or the humanities. Additionally, by studying the changing role of the horse indus-

30 SOU 1946:45, 69–70.

31 During this time grants for the breeding of horses fell under the agricultural sector (”Stuteriväsendet”). Grants were given to the ”stud-farm nation board”, stallion depots and stud-farms, prizees for breeding horses, supporting national horse races, national registration of breeding horses. The grants were increased when the totalizator was introduced. The breeding of the cold-blooded horse was supposed to be in special need of support. Jo 1964: 2, 8.

try and its actors over time, basic structures in Swedish society can be scrutinised, like the history of the labour market, the changing role of agriculture and the countryside, and the increasing importance of leisure and leisure consumption. Whether the horse industry will maintain this level of importance is impossible to say, but by understanding its history it is possible to develop a base for a popular sport – a sport that provides a large amount of income for agriculture and, simultaneously, creates an opportunity for the modern urban person to find recreation in nature.

The interest for equestrian sports increased over time. In year 2000 there were 520 riding schools and 446 private riding clubs in Sweden. (Photo: Susanna Hedenborg)

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