

14

Neolithic and Bronze Age Malta and Italy

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14.1 Introduction

Some 859 objects in the Pitt Rivers Museum (PRM) collections are from Neolithic and Bronze Age Malta and Italy. This chapter provides overviews of the collections from Neolithic and Bronze Age Malta (14.2.1) and Italy (14.2.2), and accounts of the main collectors (14.3). A discussion of the research potential of the Maltese ceramics from the Tarxien Period (14.4) is followed by brief conclusions (14.5).

14.2 Collections Overview

14.2.1 Malta

The Neolithic and Bronze Age Maltese collection comprises *c.* 385 artefacts, and is representative of the research activity in Malta up to the 1920s when it was assembled, with the important exception of figurative sculpture and large-scale material of which there are no known collections outside Malta. Most of this collection (*c.* 214 objects; 1916.38.1–69, 1918.16.50–53, 1920.24.1–55, 1927.41.1–27) was excavated by Themistocles Zammit, the founder of modern Maltese Archaeology, which adds to the significance of the collection. Further material appears to have been collected by Henry Balfour, the Curator of the PRM, himself (1916.37.1–122).

The collections consist principally of Neolithic pottery and stone tools (*Table 14.1*), but also include 6 bone and shell beads (1916.38.54, 1916.38.64–65, 1916.38.67, 1927.41.23–24), 2 distinctive V-shaped shell buttons (1916.38.55, 1927.41.22), a globigerina stone weight (1916.37.104) and a stone ball (1916.37.83). Most of the material is from the Temple of Tarxien, but some other temples are also represented: Mnajdra, Kordin and Hagar Qim (*Figure 14.1* and *Table 14.2*),¹ with less extensive coverage of funerary sites than already known, such as 21 objects from Hal Safieni. Bronze Age material includes human remains from Tarxien (1916.37.94–98) and *c.* 7 ceramic sherds from a settlement site at Bahrjia (1916.38.57–63).

14.2.2 Italy

The Italian assemblage is made up *c.* 474 artefacts, and is more disparate than the Maltese collection, although some notable individuals are also associated with it, such as Giuseppe Bellucci and Vincenzo Funghini, and it includes a significant collection of stone tools. It can be divided into four main areas.

¹ A stone racloir (1921.37.56) from Santa Verna (Gozo) was originally accessioned into the collection as a Neolithic piece, but was subsequently identified as a Middle Palaeolithic implement.

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Phase	Dates	Present/Absent in PRM	Main material in PRM
NEOLITHIC			
Ghar Dalam, Grey Skorba, Red Skorba Zebbug Mgarr	5500 – 3600 BCE	Absent	N/a
Ggantija	3600–3000 BCE	Present	Limited pottery
Tarxien/Saflieni	3000–2400 BCE	Present. Mainly Tarxien temple	Pottery, flint, shell, greenstone etc.
BRONZE AGE			
Tarxien Cemetery	2400–1500 BCE?	Present. Tarxien Temple	Pottery
Bahrija	1500 BCE–?	Present. Bahrija settlement site	Pottery

Table 14.1 Chronological representation of the Maltese archaeological collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

Sites	Approximate Number of Objects	Type of Objects	Donor(s)	Accession numbers
Tarxien	209	Pottery, flint, shell, human remains, red ochre sample	Balfour, Zammit, Buxton, Marett	1916.37.1–99, 1916.38.64–69, 1920.24.51–55, 1921.37.10–21
Mnajdra	18	Pottery, flint	Balfour, Zammit, Buxton	1916.37.110–116, 1916.38.4–14, 1921.37.55
Kordin	21	Pottery	Zammit	1916.38.26–43
Hal Saflieni	21	Pottery	Buxton, Zammit	1916.38.47–56, 1921.37.1–2
Hagar Qim	20	Pottery, flint	Balfour, Zammit	1916.37.100–9, 1916.38.15–24

Table 14.2. Principal Maltese archaeological sites represented in the collections of the Pitt Rivers Museum.

The first section is the most numerous and includes almost 200 artefacts excavated by John Bradford and P.R. Williams Hunt in Apulia (Puglia), south-eastern Italy in June 1945. Of these, the 168 objects from the Neolithic ditch deposits from San Severo are rather fragmented, although the lithics are in better condition than the pottery. These appear to belong to the earlier part of the Neolithic, perhaps the 6th millennium BCE. The Bronze Age ceramic material from the site of Coppa Nevigata is in better condition and dates broadly to the 2nd millennium BCE.

A second section comprises surface collections of lithic material, dating from the Mousterian to later prehistory, primarily from the Val di Chiana and Lago di Trasimeno area of north-east Tuscany–north central Umbria region. This material is in varied condition, depending on the nature of the sediments, which originally preserved them, ranging from rolled Cortona material to fresher Trasimeno material. A set of arrow-heads from the Cortona region, picked up from kinder sediments, is notable. These are generally found in the whole landscape in contrast to Palaeolithic material that is only found in relict landscapes.

A third section was much more opportunistically collected and ranges across small greenstone axes to smaller collections of lithics from regions as diverse as Rome, Tivoli and the Gargano (Puglia).

A fourth section is a range of 27 Bronze Age bronze implements, mostly from the PRM founding collection, dating from across the second millennium BCE (Giardino 1995).

14.3 Collectors and Collections

14.3.1 Malta

The first detailed archaeological study of the Maltese Islands was conducted by Gian Francesco Abela (1582–1655) in the mid-17th century, whose work was

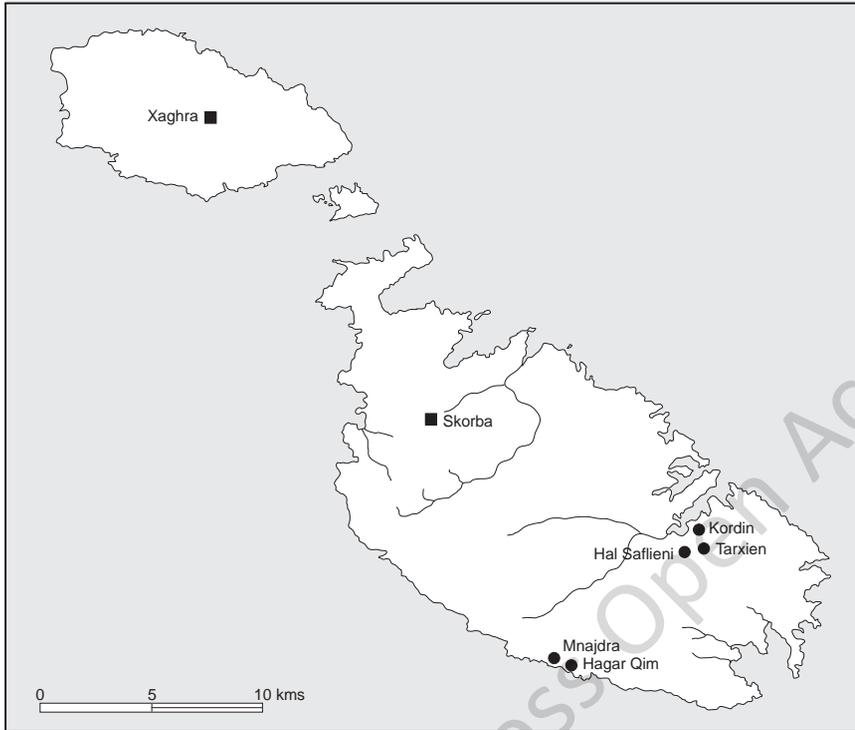


Figure 14.1 Map of
Maltese sites mentioned in
Chapter 14.

followed by that of a growing number of scholars and travellers in the 18th and 19th centuries (Evans 1971; Malone *et al.* 2009: 1–16). Serious discovery and exploration intensified during the final decades of the 18th century, when Europeans, and particularly the French under Louis XVI, recorded the Mediterranean islands, and especially the sites on Malta, Gozo and Sicily. The first archaeological excavations, in the broad sense, date from this period. Drawings were made of monuments, and these included some of the prehistoric temple sites, which until then had only been recorded fleetingly. Of particular importance for research were Jean Houël's drawings, which captured the vital details of topography, setting and monumental structures of the island, creating an invaluable archive. The Napoleonic Wars and the archaeological explorations of Egypt and beyond probably had a decisive impact on Malta, located as it was, en-route to the lands of imperial adventure, research and plunder of the ancient world. Travellers stopped off on Malta, and many stayed, exploring the antiquities of the islands. There do not appear to be any products of these activities in the PRM collections. During the middle and latter decades of the nineteenth century, other travellers made occasional studies of prehistoric sites, in many cases clearing the temples of their protective rubble and deposits, exposing the interiors and removing their contents. Little was recorded, retained or published from these decades. Although Pitt-Rivers was stationed in Malta between 1855 and 1857 (Bowden 1991: 18), an early point in his collecting activities, very little of the PRM founding collection contains Maltese material, and certainly nothing prehistoric in date.

The turn of the 20th century saw a new interest in Mediterranean prehistory, with researchers in Sicily, Italy and other islands developing new methodologies and ideas

about the early origins of the region. By this stage, Maltese scholars were making substantial contributions to the study of the archaeology of their islands, but their antiquity remained unrecognized. In spite of the increasing local interest, external input was also important. T.E. Peet (1882–1934) was instrumental in developing a comprehensive study of Italy and Sicily, and Thomas Ashby (1874–1931), although primarily a classicist, was unable to work in Italy for some years, and thus chose to work principally on earlier monumental constructions in a colony where permits were readily available. The key threshold in the understanding of the development of the prehistory of the Maltese Islands came in the early 20th century, best exemplified by the work of Sir Themistocles Zammit (1864–1935). He donated some 206 pieces to the PRM, mostly presented in 1916, although 24 pieces from his work at Tarxien were received eleven years later through the Oxford-based anthropologist Robert Ranulph Marett.

Zammit achieved international recognition for his native Malta through his scientific research. He was an accomplished archaeologist and historian, professor of chemistry, medical doctor, researcher and writer, serving as Rector (1920–1926) of the University of Malta and first Director of the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. The disease brucellosis was essentially discovered by him in 1905, and while it was named after Major-General Sir David Bruce, who was the senior colonial medic, Zammit did receive a knighthood as a result (Wyatt 2005). He was more widely recognized for his foundation of Maltese archaeology, including the first modern fieldwork, most notably at the Temple of Tarxien (Zammit 1916) and publication of other sites such as the underground burial complex or Hypogeum at Hal Saffieni, where he worked from 1907 (Zammit 1910). In the case of the Hal Saffieni Hypogeum, which had been discovered during excavations for housing in 1902, he unfortunately intervened too late to make a substantial impact on the archaeological record that has come down to us. His ability as a fieldworker was, however, demonstrated by his work at Tarxien, which remains the most comprehensive study of a Maltese temple in its apogee, decline and re-use. The material from this site that was donated to the PRM in 1916 (1916.38.1–69), forms the core of the collection. Zammit's collection has not itself been published, but the principal context for these collections is provided by his publications (1910, 1916, 1917, 1920, 1919, 1930; Zammit *et al.* 1912), the review provided by John Davies Evans (1971), and the recent publication of the Brochtorff Circle at Xaghra (Malone *et al.* 2009).

Henry Balfour, the Curator of the PRM, had visited Zammit in 1914 on his way back from Sydney,² and they undertook an excursion to Hal-saffieni and Corradino Hill together. Balfour's donations of 122 Neolithic stone and ceramic artefacts from the sites of Hal Tarxien and Mnajdra (1916.37.1–122) are recorded in the PRM's accession register as being made two years later in September 1916, and he may have visited the islands again after a summer trip, although no diaries or notebooks from this year are extant.

A few further donations were made in the subsequent years. In 1921, Leonard Halford Dudley Buxton, donated *c.* 66 Neolithic and Bronze Age ceramics and stone tools (1921.37.1–60) that he had collected in Malta in December 1920 and January 1921 to examine the ethnology of Malta and Gozo (Buxton 1921). Two fossilized shark teeth from Malta (1928.68.463–4), apparently collected because of their potential use for incising Maltese Neolithic pottery, from the John Evans collection were donated through Arthur Evans in 1928. This may explain the donation of another fossilized tooth from Malta by one Charles James Longman in 1927 (1927.24.41). Six sherds of pottery and a stone tool collected by Beatrice Blackwood from Gigantea, Gozo, may be Neolithic in date (1941.10.48–49).

² Diary entry for entry 24 October 1914 in PRM Manuscripts Collection/Balfour Papers/Box 1/Item 7 III. See <http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/manuscripts/balfourdiaries1914.html>

The work of two further authors proved most helpful in providing the earliest identification and quantification. It is a great tribute to Margaret Murray (1863–1963) that her excavations (which have contributed to the collections of the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) remain the most easily quantifiable prehistoric excavations to date from the Maltese Islands. The work of John Davies Evans (1925–2011) in the late 1940s and 1950s remains an indispensable source of reference (Evans 1971), but the lack of primary stratigraphic contexts and detailed catalogues of finds from the not insubstantial fieldwork on the Maltese Islands is sorely missed. The recent publication of the Brochtorff Circle at Xaghra provides the first quantifiable prehistoric collection from the Maltese islands (Malone *et al.* 2009), although some progress is now being made on the Skorba material (Vella 2008), which also provided a third important stratigraphic context for prehistory. There are no finds from these two sites in the PRM collection, since the custom of offering samples to foreign museums has ended, and all these finds are held in Malta. Indeed, apart from Blackwood's donations (above) there are no finds post-dating 1927 and thus the collection represents a frozen state of knowledge from the 1920s.

14.3.2 Italy

For majority of the 139 objects from Neolithic and Bronze Age Italy in the PRM founding collection, there is little information regarding who procured the items originally. A small collection of 6 flint scrapers from the Island of Elba is from the PRM founding collection, but is recorded as obtained through John Evans (1884.132.332–335, 1884.133.159, 1884.133.168). More detail is available for the c. 31 Neolithic stone tools (1884.123.680–4, 1884.123.857–879, 1884.131.10, 1884.132.390, 1884.133.99, 1884.140.995) in the PRM founding collection from Lago di Trasimeno/Cortona, Val di Chiana (Tuscany), which Pitt-Rivers purchased in 1876 from the notable collector Vincenzo Funghini (1828–1896).³ Funghini was an engineer and architect who formed important systematic collections of prehistoric, Etruscan and Medieval antiquities in Central Italy (Edlund-Berry 2001). He collected from Arezzo and his hometown of Castiglion Fiorentino, using his privileged access to drainage works in the Val di Chiana. In the company of Don Pietro Tonieri he made substantial collections of material, most of which came to form a core collection of the Arezzo Museum when it was founded in 1895. However, some of the prehistoric material was clearly purchased by Pitt-Rivers in 1876, just as some later material was published by the British Museum (e.g. Wilson *et al.* 1990). The PRM material from Cortona and Lago di Trasimeno material has not been published although Funghini published his finds from the Lake Trasimeno area in connection with exhibition at Milan in 1881 (Funghini 1881).⁴ More recently excavated material that is comparable with that in the PRM founding collection generally has been published by the local archaeological groups in collaboration with the local archaeological authorities (Gruppo Archeologico Valdichiana Castiglion Fiorentino 1993) and the range of finds and condition is very similar to that found in Perugia Museum and in the nearby Gubbio Valley (Malone and Stoddart 1994).

A further individual of note that is associated with the Museum's late 19th-century collection is Randall MacIver (1873–1945), who contributed greatly to the PRM's Egyptian collections (see Chapter 5). Later in his career MacIver became a significant scholar of Iron Age and Etruscan Italy, as well as of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, publishing

³ It is currently unclear whether a further 68 Neolithic stone tools from Lago di Trasimeno/Cortona from the PRM founding collection (1884.135.95–163) derive from Pitt-Rivers' purchase from Funghini or not.

⁴ This volume is available in the Oxford Library system: possibly the only copy in the UK.

some of the earliest systematic accounts in English on these themes (Hencken and Stoddart 2004). The collection in the PRM, however, was made twenty years prior to this work and the 10 lithic objects (1899.43.4–13) that he presented from the Perugia area (slightly further east) in 1899 is incidental. This material would have come from Pleistocene lake basins broadly similar to the work of Funghini, but was addressed less systematically, and probably purchased rather than directly collected.

Material from John Wickham Flower, transferred from the OUMNH in 1892, forms the remainder of the late 19th-century additions to the prehistoric Italian collections. Towards the end of his life, and indeed contributing to the disease that led to his death, Flower appears to have visited Italy and made a second-hand collection from the market, and thus to have contributed a varied range of material from different parts of Italy. The c. 102 objects are consistent with the nature of Flower's wider collection, with its emphasis on stone tools; for example, stone axes recorded as from Ponte Molle/Mentana, Rome (1892.67.567–579, 1892.67.582–590). However, the Italian material also includes an assemblage of c. 62 Neolithic stone spindlewhorls, bone points and teeth, alongside early casts of stone tools, from Lago di Varese/Bodio (1892.67.33–36, 1892.67.544–548, 1892.67.550–551, 1892.67.553–557, 1892.67.560, 1892.67.594–595, 1892.67.615–628, 1892.67.725–726, 1892.67.802), some of which are recorded as being illustrated in Ferdinand Keller's *The Lake Dwellings of Switzerland and other parts of Europe* (1878: Plates CLXII–CLXIV). Five further Neolithic stone tools from Lake Varese were donated by Henry Balfour in 1901 (1901.4.106–110).

Although not donated until 1940, the 67 objects presented by Mrs Charis E.F. Thomas, including the fine set of 58 arrow-heads (1940.12.210.1–58), appear to have been collected systematically by her father and grandfather at about the same period or a little later (1890s) in the same Val di Chiana area in which Funghini was working. In contrast with the lack of knowledge about the original field collectors themselves the collection is relatively large. Moreover, the relative consistency of the material acquired demonstrates recognition not only of Neolithic/Chalcolithic arrow-heads, but also of Mousterian material placing them in a laudable category close to Funghini since such materials are easily overlooked. The remaining contributors to the PRM's Italian Neolithic and Bronze Age holdings appear to be Oxford graduates of lesser significance both in terms of their collections and in terms of their histories (e.g. C. Newton Robinson and Walter William Bishop), although some single objects are interesting, such as a fine Chalcolithic 'lance head' from Nettuno (1988.39.42), collected by Walter William Bishop in 1886 and donated through Queen Mary College, University of London in 1988.

It is, however, the 199 pieces presented by archaeologist John Bradford that represents the major strength of the PRM's Italian prehistoric collections. His most notable contribution relates to his pioneering work in aerial photography and his photographic collections in the Museum are of particular interest. Bradford shared this interest with Crawford and published much of his work in *Antiquity* (Bradford 1947, 1949, 1950, 1957, Bradford and Williams-Hunt 1946; Stoddart 2000). In addition to his photographic archive, Bradford also donated 165 objects (ceramics and flintwork) from his excavations at the early Neolithic ditched village of San Severo (1946.2.16–31, 1947.2.495), and 34 Bronze Age ceramic sherds and a piece of daub from the multi-period site of Coppa Nevigata (1946.1.13–26). Bradford's ill health interrupted work, which was finally published by Barri Jones at a much later date (Jones 1987) and by Italian researchers at Coppa Nevigata (Cazzella and Moscoloni 1988a, 1988b; Cazzella and Moscoloni 1990; Cazzella *et al.* 1991).

The most recent set of material to be received by the Museum that is relevant to this discussion consists of c. 13 amulets collected by Giuseppe Bellucci (1844–

1921), most of which are part of the 1985 loan from the Wellcome Institute, and which are made from stone axes or flint arrow-heads of probable prehistoric date (1901.49.1–7, 1985.50.91, 1985.50.95, 1985.50.102, 1985.50.108, 1985.50.433). Bellucci was a significant figure who was Chair of Organic Chemistry at Perugia University from 1874 and was subsequently rector of the University. A polymath, he was interested in palaeontology, palaeontology (prehistory) and ethnography. He was also a characteristic positivist of his age who made very substantial collections of archaeological finds in the thousands, was a friend of significant contemporaries such as G. B. Rossi Scotti and M. Guardabassi and attended many conferences including the 1871 *Vth Congresso Internazionale di Arte Preistorica*, an occasion which celebrated the major discoveries of the age at Hallstatt, Villanova and in the Terramare (of the Po valley). He gave his collection to Perugia Museum where it has recently been the subject of renewed interest exploring not only his material but also his personality. Perugia Museum (in spite of its reorganization) remains one of the best displays of prehistory anywhere in Italy. He was not only interested in prehistoric finds, but also in amulets which often sacralized prehistoric objects for use in more recent times.

14.4 Tarxien Period Artefacts from Malta

The principal strength of the Maltese and Italian prehistoric collections lies in Maltese pottery (*Figure 14.2*), and especially Tarxien period pottery. There are no complete vessels, but the 141 substantial sherds fit nicely into established forms and decorative categories. Classic examples include parts of a shallow decorated bowl (1921.37.6), which can be compared with an example given by Trump (2004: 261); a classic projecting Tarxien handle from Hal Tarxien (1927.41.2; compare Trump 2004: 261); a classic internal Tarxien handle on an amphora form from Kordin (1916.38.43; compare Trump 2004: 263); characteristic fanned-decorated sherds (e.g. 1916.38.5 from Hal Tarxien; compare Malone *et al.* 2009: figure 10.16 D); and sherds with encrusted decoration (e.g. 1927.41.1; compare Malone *et al.* 2009: figure 10.13 J). There is a smaller range of Bronze Age material from Tarxien and Bahrija as well as some Ggantija period pottery, but none (as far as could be judged) of other periods in the Neolithic Maltese sequence.

The 22 artefacts that comprise the struck stone collection were donated by Balfour, Zammit, Marett and Blackwood, and include both local chert and imported flint from Sicily (1916.37.85–89, 1916.37.105–109, 1916.37.112–115, 1916.37.55–56, 1916.38.20–24, 1927.41.20, 1941.10.49). The best studied comparisons are from Borg in Nadur, Skorba and the Brochtorff Circle at Xaghra.

Other finds cover some aspects of Tarxien period material culture, but are much less representative. There is a small but interesting collection of minute beads similar to finds from the Brochtorff Circle at Xaghra (1916.38.54; compare Malone *et al.* 2009: figure 10.41), some specimens of ochre pigment (1916.38.68), and some burnt corn seeds (1916.38.69) collected during Zammit's 1916 excavations. The most interesting decorative items are two V-shaped shell buttons (1927.41.22 and 1916.38.55; Zammit *et al.* 1912: 10–11), which also have close comparisons from the Brochtorff Circle at Xaghra (Malone *et al.* 2009: figure 10.40 SF 182a). Two minor Tarxien curiosities are present, and by their very nature, without precedent: a spacer bead (1916.38.67) and a decorated bird bone with circular striations (1916.38.66). The Tarxien collection also includes the cutting edge of a greenstone axe (1921.37.54), the handle portion of a globigerina stone weight (1916.37.104; compare Malone *et al.* 2009: figure 10.34, SF 406), 2 'slingstones' (1921.37.58–59), and 2 pebbles that are characteristically found on sites of this period (1916.37.84, 1916.37.86).



Figure 14.2 Examples of pottery sherds from Maltese temple sites in the Pitt Rivers Museum (no accession numbers, as these artefacts have not yet been physically numbered).

14.5 Conclusions

The PRM holds one of the most comprehensive collections of Tarxien-period prehistoric pottery outside Malta, and provides some coverage of other materials in flint, chert, stone, shell and bone. Other periods of later Maltese prehistory are less well covered. The strengths of the Italian collection lie in the excavation assemblages of Bradford and the useful range of flintwork from the Mousterian to Chalcolithic, most notably from the Val di Chiana/Lake Trasimene, Perugia area, and from Lago di Varese/Bodio. The collections include at least one fine core (1884.131.10), small polished axes and an extensive set of arrow-heads. The metalwork is not of great quantity, but covers the full chronological range of the Bronze Age. There are interesting historical links to significant figures in the history of archaeology in this region such as Giuseppe Bellucci and to Vincenzo Funghini who were certainly fundamental figures for their region. The material provides opportunities for exchange of information and expertise with Perugia Museum and Arezzo Museum, because so much for the material derives from their region. The finds complement recent work by amateur groups in Val di Chiana and the discoveries of the Gubbio project (Malone and Stoddart 1994). In the light of debates about eras of discovery they show some common trends of discovery (Cardarelli *et al.* 1980; di Gennaro and Stoddart 1982). Some limited research could easily fit these finds into the *Prähistorische Bronzefunde* (PBF) volumes that have been published for Italy (Carancini 1984).

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