

Journey to Connaught — April 1709

BY

DR. THOMAS MOLYNEUX

Friday, 8th — Left Moat with Staples in y' coach about 9 a clock. Came in 3 hours, thro' indifferent coach roads, wild sheepwalks, and scrubby hills and bogs, to Athlone, which is a handsome large town, scituated on y' noble river y' Shannon. Here we saw y' miserable ruins of y' castle, which was some years ago blown up[1], y' magazine of powder there kept taking fire by accident. Here are a horse and foot barrack, and some good brass and iron ordinance. This town is famous for y' manufacture of felts, which are here sold from 2 to 4 shillings price.

Crossing y' Shannon you enter into Connaught. Here I travell'd from Athlone 4 or 5 mile in y' coach with Staples, and about 2 more rid to Killeglan[2], in 3 hours. Y' miles are here very long, as they generally encrease in bad country and distant parts from Dublin ; y' soyl is very rocky and stony ; much bog, with sheepwalk & scrubs. I observ'd scarce any corn or enclosures but old ruin'd ones of stones heap'd along in rows, which way of enclosing land, by being so frequently met with in many parts of Ireland, seems once to have been much in use, and indeed I wonder is not so still in these stony parts. In all this journey I think I observ'd many more beggars everywhere than is usual on a road, allowing, as I believe, to the present hard times of war.

At Killeglan we stay'd 8 days[3], and met little observable. There are here to be dug out of the hill on which the house stands stones almost globular, some liker an egg, some oblate sphaeroids, from y' size of a nutmeg to twice the bigness of one's head. There are other stones in y' same hill, and on y' land adjoining, which when broke, in y' body of 'em are found inclos'd cockle shells of all sizes, some petryfy'd, some yet perfect fryable shells. In one of these stones, when we broke it, we found 8 or 10 whole small cockles, and a long cilindricall figur'd stone of y' bigness and length of one's little finger, of a substance different from y' cockles, as well as from y' body of y' stone itself ; of all these stones I have by me. Found hereabout are also but few curiositys of antiquity, some old chappells and crosses, but not one very ancient that I saw : the one whose figure bespoke it the most ancient is here represented ; its date, I think, makes it not 200 year old. The Danes indeed have left here some monuments of antiquity which I have not met with elsewhere, and these are forts, not cast up with earth and trenches as usuall, but wholly compos'd of stones heap'd round in a circle of the common compass. Tho' they are now old and ruin'd, and allmost defac'd, they still have the appearance of Danish forts, and are so call'd and generally reputed in y' country', tho' indeed I do not find their common mounts or forts so frequent in these parts to conclude they ever had here so good footing as in y' N. E. parts of Ireland, which lay more opportune for their invasions and settlement. They have here a sort of ropes made of y' roots of firr trees[4], here frequently dug out of the boggs : these they beat like hemp, and then twist them into roaps ; they are pretty flexible, and I am told, more lasting, especially in damp places, than any other cords : they are made in Athlone, and are much us'd for cording beds in damp clay floors, where they last for ever, whereas till they made these roaps they were us'd to change their hemp cords every day.

Walking here in y' fields, I met with an odd stone all spotted white at one end, y' spots continuing in white streaks down the side of the stone. Breaking it, we found in y' body of y' stone answering to each white spot a long tract or round vein of a more flinty substance than y' rest of y' stone. Of this stone I have some pieces by me, y' spotts and round flinty veins within, when broke accross, appearing in rays from y' center to y'" circumference.

They tell here an odd story, and gave me y' jaw of a young lamb with perfect large teeth in't. They say it was so yean'd, as large near and wooly as one of a twelvemonth old, but dead, and y' flesh corrupted. Along with it was yean'd another lamb of y' ordinary size, rather less. The yoe that brought them is alive, and, as they say, was big from y' season before, and they therefore think the first lamb lay in her womb so long.

Sunday, 17th — I left Killeglan at 8 1/2 in y' afternoon, in order to go to Gallway. We came in 2 hours, thro' good roads and an open country ; nothing of enclosures, but some scrubs and boggs, a great deall of stony ground, with some sheepwalks, to Ballynasloe[5], which is a very pretty scituated village on y' river Suck[6], which divides y' county of Roscommon from y' county of Gallway. Here is a Danesmount[7], with a large trench round it : 'tis so flat one might allmost take it for a fort : this, with one more, were the only mounts I saw on all y' road between Killeglan and Gallway, tho' their forts were all along mighty frequent. From this village we reach'd in 2 hours more to Killconell, thro' a better country, the land it self better, and not near so stony. We pass'd by Garbelly[8] and some other pretty scituated seats seats, besides a number of Danes-forts, in one of which, on y' lands of Dungongon[9], belonging to my uncle Usher, we were told there was a vault under-ground : we went to it, and enter'd it at one end by a hole accidentally discover'd at *a*. The first vault, which run north and south, was, from *a* to *b*, 26 f. 1/2 long, 5 1/2 broad, 5 1/2 high ; the next vault, from *d* to *e*, every way the same dimensions, as was the 3rd also, from *g* to *A*, only 6 f. longer. The walls that made y^e sides of these vaults were stones, layd without lime or water (*sic*) flat on one another from y' ground : the covering was large flagstones, which were so large as to reach from side to side. In y' vault *d e*, y' flat stones that made y' walls advanc'd and hung over one another, so as to make a kind of arch, and came so near at the height of 5 1/2 that the covering flagstones at the top were not nere so broad as in y' other vaults : at *b* there seems to have been a partition of stones, which is now thrown down, as also another at *g* ; the little place *b, c, d* has its floor of one broad flag, and rais'd so that you ascend about 2 or 3 f. at *b, a, d*, descend as much at *d*, thro' a narrow passage of about 2 f square left for that purpose there : at *e* you ascend again by alike narrow passage into another little apartment as before ; from thence you descend on y' rubbish of a ruin'd partition, as it seems to have been, at *g*, into y' last and inward vault, whose end, *h*, was stopp'd, as *a*, with stones, but is now broke open up to the air, and, as we judg'd, was nearly the center of the mount. They seem not to have been pav'd, unless by a few stones thrown loose here and there on y' earth. Having view'd this curiosity, we went to take up with sad lodging at the poor village village of Kilconell, where was miserable accommodation of all things but good wine from Gallway.

Monday, 19th. [10] — At Killconell we saw the famous old Abby of Franciscans, where was little of antiquity or remarkable. Their churchyard is surrounded by a wall of dead men's sckulls and bones[11], pil'd very orderly, with their faces outwards, clear round against the wall to the length of 88 foot, about 4 high, and 5'ft. 4in. broad, so that there may be possibly here to the number of 50000 sckulls : within they shew you Ld Gallway's and other great men's heads kill'd at Aghrim. This Abby was in repair, and inhabited by Fryers, in K. James' time, so that some of the woodwork, the wainscot, and ordinary painting yet remains ; nay I am told 2 of y' Fryers are yet alive, and live, tho' blind with age, on y' charity of the neig[h]bouring papists, in a poor cabin, in a very small island, which they shew'd me, not 1/2 a mile from Killconell, in a bog : they employ one to begg for them[12], and by that means subsist near their old habitation.

Having gotton out of this miserable village, we rid 4 hours thro' a fine champain country ; no enclosures, generally good land, yet pretty good roads. We pass'd thro Killtollogh[13], and came to y' ancient Burrow of Athenree[14] : it is all wall'd, and makes, with its old round towers on y' walls and other old buildings within, a very venerable appearance and pretty prospect, it being built on green fields, and not a house without the walls : it seems to have been of old a well inhabited and thriving town, on account of y' large pav'd streets and many ruin'd houses which remain ; it has nothing now but cabins in it, and those so few they have

room for all y' gardens too within y' walls, which I am told enclose more than Dublin walls, and at least 33 acres. Here we met Sr T. Montgomery', who seeing us gaping strangers, invited us in to look at his improvements, which are pretty and whimsicall enough : part of his house is y' wing of an old Abby repair'd, which makes an odd and convenient house. He has lately set up here a napping and a tucking mill, and designs a weaving manufactory, the inhabitants of the town being, as he tells me, allmost all weavers and cottoners.

As you go out of town to Gallway you meet with a pretty new improvement of Mr. Shaw's. From hence you travell thro' a barren gravelly soyl to Gallway in 4 hours. As you draw near Gallway the country grows extreamly stony, and in many places one may observe naturall cawseys of stones, which, tho' not so regularly form'd as y' Gyants' Cawsey in y' county of Antrim, are yet so like one another, all consisting of stones full of fissures and cracks, and lying in great layers or strata one over another, the fissures paralell to the horison, that one that sees 'em can't but rank 'em among regular form'd stones, which a description or even a draught of 'em could scarce be exact enough to make one think. There are many of these cawseys on each hand the road : one only I observ'd in which y' rinioe or cracks of y' stone directed upwards. All along, as we travell'd thro' y' county of Gallway, I observ'd a very great number of heaps of stones rais'd into a Pyramid[15], some with lime, generally without, along the road, in memory, as I am told of burials that have pass'd that way. Their enclosures of land are here odd enough, being walls of single stones, so pil'd up without mortar that as you pass by you may see thro', and they stand so ticklish, the beasts, that know the way of them, will not come near 'em for fear of throwing 'em down on themselves, so that they serve as well as stronger. I observ'd on y' road many figur'd stones here and there, like y' one describ'd page 7th [*vide* p. 165], and in y' pavement of a street in Athenree a stone consisting of pillars, with appearance of joynts, like y' Gyants' Cawsey, of all numbers of sides as that too ; nay, indeed, the generality of y' stones that ly at the sides of the way between Athenree and Gallway have something very different from common stones in their figure, which is much more scraggy than usuall, and full of holes : their surfaces are very smooth and their colour black, so that in every thing they look like stones to be seen on the sea shore, much excavated and beaten by y' waves. This resemblance of these stones, with the aforemention'd cawseys, the like of which are often seen also among rocks at the sea shore, with the universall stony-ness of y' country, has sometimes almost tempted me to think this place was once y' bottom of y' sea : however, 'tis certain y' stones here are not like those of other countrys.

Tuesday, 20th. — The weather being not very fair, I stay'd at home, and writ to Dublin.

Wednesday, 21st — I went to visit old Flaherty[16], who lives, very old, in a miserable condition at Park, some 3 hours west of Gallway, in Hiar or West-Connaught. I expected to have seen here some old Irish manuscripts, but his ill fortune has stripp'd him of these as well as his other goods, so that he has nothing now left but some few of his own writing, and a few old rummish books of history printed. In my life I never saw so strangely stony and wild a country. I did not see all this way 3 living creatures, not one house or ditch, not one bit of corn, nor even, I might say, a bit of land, for stones: in short nothing appear'd but stones and sea, nor could I conceive an inhabited country so destitute of all signs of people and art as this is. Yet here, I hear, live multitudes of barbarous uncivilized Irish after their old fashions, who are here one and all in y' defence of any of their own or even other rogues that fly to them, against the laws of Ireland, so that here is the assylum, here are committed the most barbarous murders after shipracks, and all manner of roguerys protected, that the Sheriffs of this county scar[c]e dare appear on y' west side of Gallway bridge, which, tho' Ireland is now generally esteem'd wholly civilized, may well be call'd the end of the English pale, which distinction should still have place as long as the inhabitants live with us in so open a state of nature[17]. , , .

Having got back again safe thro' this barbarous country to Gallway, I din'd with some of y' officers who were here quarter'd. After dinner they walk'd me round y' town and citadell : the

fortifications are in better order, and seem to have more of present strength, there being a good number of brass and iron ordinance mounted and fitt for use, than any town I saw in Ulster ; and indeed, Dublin excepted, this is the best town taken altogether I have seen in Ireland. The houses are all built of stone, of course kind of marble[18], all like one another, like castles for their arch'd doors and strong walls, windows, and floors, and seem to have all been built much about the same time, after the modell, as I hear, of some town in Flanders. The inhabitants are most Roman Catholicks, and the trade is wholly in their hands, and indeed in all Connaught, as you go farther from Dublin, you may see the remains of Popery, yet less and less extinct than in y' other parts of Ireland. Here are 2 nunnerys, who, keeping some-what private, are conniv'd at by y' Governour and Mayor. At y' Gates I observ'd y' sentinells have gotten a use of taking 2 turfs from every horse that comes in with turf, allso, I hear, with herrings, (and, I believe, with other things) which is much more than y' toll due to y' Mayor : this greivance the officers told me they think themselves excus'd from redressing till y' civill power thinks itself so injur'd as to complain, which, it seems, they don't yet. They have here 2 mass houses for one church, which is indeed a pretty modell'd one, but with little ornaments ; one tomb is in it of very good and well polish'd black marble well streak'd with white, I believe from the Isles of Bofin[19], where I am told there is a good quarry of such. We saw here y' Town-house, which is built on piazzas, but has nothing remarkable, and is not yet finish'd, y' Barracks, one in y' citadell, the other new built at another end of the town, both for foot : they hold about a regiment. Having view'd the town, I was directed where I might have a map of it[20], which I bought, and seems pretty exact : 'twas done at Brussells by a fryer who was born and bred in this town, and, they tell you, had been at Brussells 8 years when he made it.

Thursday, 22nd — Walk'd about the town and view'd it further. The inhabitants, I find, are all what they call English Irish, *i: e:* familys that came over at or soon after the Conquest, and were here settled in this strong town as a Colony against the naturall Irish of these parts, and whose posterity still live here, and with their old religion enjoy also their old possessions[21]

Friday, 23rd — Went in a boat down a branch of Gallway river call'd Powley Hurly, to see the place where it enters and runs under ground, which it does for 3 miles. It enters about a mile from town, among y' rocks and stones all along the side of a hill, in one place of which there is a naturall cave in y' rock, at the inward part of which, about some 6 or 8 yards in, you meet part of y' river running. The inside of this cave is all cover'd with a thick coat, of a substance much resembling chalk in colour and insipidness to tast : it swims when it falls on y' water, and seems somewhat oily when rub'd in one's hand. We also were to see 2 Danes-forts which have caves in 'em as the one before describ'd, and I am told they are very frequently found in y' forts of this country.

Saturday, 24th — Left Gallway about 5 in y' morning, and came, thro' a fine open champain country, to Loughree in 4 1/2 h. hard riding. Loughree is a pretty scituated wall'd town, by y' side of a fine Lough. Here are y' ruins of a fine seat of y' old Earl of Clanrickards. All y' country between Gallway and this place is full of old castles, built, as I suppose, about the time Gallway was, that is, about the time of y' first plantation of Ireland by y' English after y' Conquest. On y' road I saw an odd monument or pillar of hewn stone, of y'annext figure, without lime or mortar. From Loughree we came in 4 hours more to Balynasloe, thro' y' famous village of Aghrim, where yet are seen y' ruins of y' old castle, and a few dead men's sckulls scatter'd in y' fields, y' remains of y' battle[21] there fought in y' troubles. This is still a fine open country, and in some places improv'd. 2 hours more brought us home again to Killeglan. At Killeglan we stay'd again [6] days, and met with nothing more remarkable but what we had seen before. We gather'd some more of y* sphairicall stones mention'd page y' [165.]

Wednesday, y' 28th — We were invited to see an old altar that stands on y' lands of Mucklon [22] in y' coun : of Gallway, as y' proprietor of y' land and y' Irish have been pleas'd to call it.

It is compos'd of severall rude unhewn flat stones, one of 12 or 14 foot square, and about 2 fo: thick, being layd flat on some others of 8 or 9 foot high, of which there might have been some 15 or 20 supporting y' large one at top clear round, set edgewise on y' ground, so as to leave a hollow within, and make a sort of box of rude stones. It seems to me to have been a Danish burying place of y' same nature with one in a Danes-mount at Knowth, in which was found a rude stone urn[23], which I have by me : 'tis now almost so ruin'd that one cannot readily find out its ancient position and figure, y' stones that made y' wall to support y' upper one on 2 sides being entirely ruin'd, broken and carry'd away by y' owner of y' land for building ; nay, one of y' corners of y' upper stone is knock'd off, and y' whole, by losing its support, is fallen at one corner to the ground, so that there is but one side lel't by which one can judge of its true scituation, and even there y' supporting porting stones are plainly struck out of their former posture ; but I am assur'd there are some living that remember it formerly standing as I judg'd it to have stood from what yet remains ; nay, y' gentleman that shew'd it us, on whose estate it stands, told me it was much as I have describ'd it in his memory, before he broke y' stones for building. This artificiall curiosity is surrounded by as great ones of nature : it stands in y' middle of a naturall cawsey of vast stones, some 20 or 30 foot square, all of one height, about 2 f from y' earth : between y' stones one may let down a cord 15 or 20 f. down, tho' they are not at 3 inches distances from one another ; their surfaces are not plain, but pretty smooth, with great inaequalitys, protuberances, and excavations. There are 3 or 4 of these Cawseys here, which are much of a sort with those at Gallway, describ'd page y' 14th [vide p. 169]. Y' loose stones that lye here about, of which there are a great number confus'dly thrown about y' monument, are every one of them figiu'd stones of y' kind describ'd page 7'? [vide p. 165]: I gathered up 3 or 4 of them, and brought them away, and might have taken cart loads. One stone I met here, but not of this kind, with shells in't as those at Killeglan ; even y' large stones of y' Cawsey themselves have some of them some parts of them of this kind of stone ; nay, 2 or 3 we observ'd of about 10 or 12 f. bigness entirely of this composition of flinty veins, as the spots on their surfaces shew'd. Here grow also in y' clefts of y' rocks many herbs, rare, as I am told, and sought for far and near for medicinall uses, so that perhaps a skillfull botanist might find somewhat to employ his curiosity in this place, as well as the Antiquary or other naturalist.

[1] *Ballygore*. — Or Ballinagore, a village about three miles N. W. of Tyrrell's-pass.

[2] *Blown up*. — “ On the 27th of October, 1697, the Magazine of Athlone fired by lightning, blew up the Castle, and divers houses, and fourteen persons were killed.” — *Ware's Gesta Hibernorum*. Dublin, fol. 1705. A true narrative of this disaster is given in Dr. Streat's Survey of St. Peter's parish, in Mason's Statistical Survey, vol. iii. p. 50; and in Weld's Stat. Hist, of Co. Roscommon, p. 531.

[3] *Killeglan*. — Is situated a few miles north of the road from Athlone to Ballinasloe, and at about equal distance from each town.

[4] *Stay'd 8 days*. — From the original his draft of the “ Journey,” we learn that our Author's stay at Killeglan was prolonged, in consequence of “ foul weather,” from the 11th to the 16th of April, during which time he wrote several letters to his friends. He alludes, at p. 165, to “ some monuments of antiquity, which have the appearance of Danish forts.” This evinces singular indecision on the subject, after his curious and decisive letter to his brother, dated 2nd June, 1684, wherein he correctly questions “ whether the Danes' mounts be rightly called, or whether they be the works of the Danes.” — See Dub. University Magazine, Oct. 1841, p. 483.

[5] *Ropes made of the roots of fir trees*, — are still used by the peasantry in many parts of the country for cording *bedsteads* and for lines for drying linen.

- [6] *Ballynasloe*. — On the 26th of February, 1716, Ballinasloe, with its fairs and markets and other lands, were sold by William Spenser (grandson of the celebrated poet Edmund Spenser), and his son Nathaniel, to Frederick Trench. — See Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy*, vol. i. p.319.Lond. 1831.
- [7] *Suck* — For an account of this river, see *Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many*, printed for the Irish Archaeological Society, p. 84; and Weld's *Stat. Survey of Roscommon*, p. 97.
- [8] *Dane's-mount*. — This is one of the ancient numerous remains of the Pagan Irish, erroneously attributed to the Danes by Dr. Molyneux. It is remarkable how generally this error has since spread throughout Ireland,
- [9] *Garbelly*. — Garbally Park, now the noble seat of the Earl of Clancarty.
- [10] *Dungongon*. — This vault or cave is described in our Author's *Discourse concerning the Danish Mounts*, p. 209, but its locality is not mentioned.
- [11] *Monday, 19th* — This and all the subsequent dates are one day in advance.
- [12] To begg for them. — Sir Henry Piers, in his “ *Description of the County of WestMeath,*” gives a curious account of an Anchorite who lived at Foure, and had proctors to beg for him through the country. See Vallancey's *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. i. p. 64.
- [13] Sckulls and bones —In a memorandum on one of the fly leaves is given the following ements of " The wall of heads round the churchyard: 33 canes long —1 1/2 high — 2 broad, my cane is 2 f : 8 inches long," which correspond exactly with the dimensions given in the text.
- [14] *Killtollogh*. — A poor village, near which is Kiltullagh House, the seat of J. D'Arcey, Esq.
- [15] *Athenree*. — For the ancient murage charter granted to this town by Edw.II. in 1310 ; see O'Flaherty's *History of West Connaught*, printed for the Irish Archæological Society, note ", p. 265 ; see also Grace's *Annals*, p. 73.
- [16] *Sir T. Montgomery*. — July 23rd, 1707, a petition was presented to the House of Commons in behalf of Robert Shaw, Esq., and others, complaining of the undue practises of Sir Thomas Montgomery in the Borough of Athenry. His election to the place of Portrieve of Athenry was subsequently declared void, and he was ordered to deliver the ensigns of magistracy to John Ormsby, Esq., the legal Portrieve of Athenry Index to the *Journ. of the House of Commons of Ireland, Petitions*, No. 831.
- [17] *Pyramid*. — These “ *Pyramids*” may still be seen, with many more since erected, not “ in memory of burials,” but to clear the fields of stones. They have been mistaken by Dr. Molyneux for the Irish *leacht*, or pile of stones in memory of the dead ; generally raised on the spot where some sudden or accidental death occurred. This ancient practice is still observed.
- [18] *Old Flaherty*. — Roderick Flaherty, the learned Author of the " *Ogygia*" " *History of West Connaught,*" edited by James Hardiman, Esq.,for the Irish Archaeological Society. Here we incidentally discover the state of misery to whichthis venerable man was reduced in his old age, after the confiscation of his ancientand ample inheritauce. For a biograpliical notice of this learned individual, see the genealogical and historical Account of the O'Flahertys, compiled from original documents, in Appendi.x II. to *History of West Connaught*, p. 362.

[19] *State of nature* — O Flaherty, in his History of West Connaught, p. 16, says “ The inhabitants are so observant of law, that now for above thirty years of peace, there was not one body executed out of the whole territories for any transgression ; and scarce any brought to the bar for misdemeanour.”

The description given by Dr. Molyneux may be contrasted with the following, from the pen of a distinguished Englishman, Sir John Harrington, the translator of Ariosto, who visited this part of Ireland more than a century before Molyneux : “ They (the Iryshrie) (do appear in the upper sorte) very kinde and hospitable to all new comers, as I did well experience in this countrie, even so much as (if my owne lands were here) I woude hazard my dwellinge with them for life. I was often well entertained, and in some sorte got ill will for speakinge in praise of their civil usage among our owne commanders, whom I often tolde that tho' I was sente oute to fighte with some, there did appear no reason for my not eatinge with others. I was well usede, and therefore am in dutie bououde to speake welle of the Irishrie.”

— *Notes and Remembrances*, by Sir John Harrington, A. D. 1599 ; published in *Nugæ Antiquæ*. Edited by Thomas Park, 8vo. London, p. 176.

[20] *Kind of marble*. — It is a literal fact that most of the old edifices here were built of marble, as their ruins testify. Hence the ancient poet sung of this town :

— “ ex duro est marmore quæque domus.”

[21] *Isles of Bofin*. — Rather from the vicinity of the town, which abounds with the finest black marble.

[22] *Map of it*. — A copy of this rare and curious map is preserved in the M.S library of Trinity College, Dublin. See also Hardiman's Hist, of Gaiway, p. 24.

[23] *Old possessions*. — They did not enjoy them without interruption ; for, in A. D. 1708, the year before our traveller's visit, Richard Wall, the mayor, by order of the Privy Council, “ turned all the Popish inhabitants out of the town and garrison, committed all the Popish priests to goal, removed the market outside the walls, and gave orders to prevent mass being said in town.” — *Orig. Return to the Council, the 19th March 1707/8*].

[24] *Battle*. — Fought on the 12th of July, 1691, between the forces of William III. and the Irish army of James II.

[25] *Mucklon*. — Muicklin, a village on the west side of the river Suck, about six miles N. E. of Ahascragh, in the county of Galway.

[26] *Stone Urn*. — This urn, which was found at Knowth, in the county of Meath, is described scribe'd, and the description accompanied with two engravings, in Dr. Molyneux's Discourse concerning the Danish Mounts, &c., appended to Boate's Natural Hist, of Ireland. Dublin, 4to., 1755, p. 200; see also Harris's Ware, vol. ii. p. 146. A stone urn, bearing a close resemblance to it, is in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy.

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