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THE ACCULTURATION OF LOCAL AND SHIA CULTURES IN THE TABOT TRADITION OF BENGKULU

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ABSTRACT

This study applies J. Powell's theory of acculturation to analyze the cultural synthesis in the Tabot ceremony, examining the mutual influences between Shia traditions and Bengkulu's indigenous practices. Utilizing a descriptive-qualitative methodology, the research involves comprehensive library research for historical and cultural contexts, complemented by fieldwork with the Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot (KTT), the tradition's custodians. Data analysis follows a structured three-stage process: reduction, display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This approach ensures a thorough and accurate interpretation of findings. The Tabot ceremony commemorates the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein bin Ali bin Abi Talib, in the battle against Ubaidillah bin Zaid's forces in Karbala, Iraq, on the 10th of Muharram, 61 Hijri (681 AD). Initiated by Sheikh Burhanuddin, also known as Imam Senggolo, in 1685, the first Tabot celebration marked his union with a Bengkulu native, founding the Tabot lineage. This annual event spans from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram. Although originally a Shia Islamic rite, the Tabot ceremony transformed under the influence of Sunni Islam in Bengkulu, leading the descendants of Shia propagators to fervently adopt Sunni Islam. Despite this shift, they continue to observe the Tabot Ritual as a "universal Islamic religious rite" highlighting the doctrinal harmony between Shia and Sunni Islam. Thus, the Tabot Ritual is upheld as crucial for preserving and perpetuating ancestral heritage.

Keywords: Acculturation, Bengkulu, Shia, Tabot

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menggunakan teori akulturasi J. Powell untuk menganalisis sintesis budaya dalam upacara Tabot, menelaah pengaruh tradisi Syiah dan adat Bengkulu. Metodologi deskriptif-kualitatif diterapkan melalui studi pustaka dan kerja lapangan bersama Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot (KKT). Analisis data dilakukan melalui tiga tahap: reduksi, display, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Dari kajian yang dilakukan dapat diketahui bahwa upacara Tabot memperingati kesyahidan cucu Nabi Muhammad, Hussein bin Ali, dalam pertempuran Karbala pada 10 Muharram, 61 Hijriah (681 M). Dimulai oleh Sheikh Burhanuddin (Imam Senggolo) pada 1685, perayaan Tabot pertama menandai pernikahannya dengan penduduk asli Bengkulu, membentuk garis keturunan Tabot. Upacara tahunan ini berlangsung dari 1 hingga 10 Muharram. Meskipun awalnya ritual Islam Syiah, upacara Tabot berubah di bawah pengaruh Islam Sunni di Bengkulu, namun tetap dijalankan sebagai "ritual agama Islam universal" yang menunjukkan keharmonisan doktrinal antara Syiah dan Sunni. Ritual Tabot penting untuk melestarikan warisan leluhur.

Kata Kunci: Akulturasi, Bengkulu, Syiah, Tabot



INTRODUCTION

Culture encompasses the comprehensive systems of ideas, actions, and artifacts that shape human lives and are internalized through learning processes (Fikriyah, 2020). It originates from human cognition and is subsequently manifested in daily practices. Cultural fusion, a phenomenon widely recognized globally, can be categorized into two primary forms: assimilation and acculturation.

Acculturation represents the process through which two cultures merge without the original culture being abandoned. This occurs when a group of people with a particular cultural identity encounters a foreign culture, gradually integrating elements of the foreign culture into their own without losing their original cultural identity. Essentially, acculturation transpires when a foreign culture assimilates into a traditional local culture. An illustrative example of acculturation in the Indonesian archipelago is the Tabot tradition in Bengkulu, which is influenced by Shia teachings.

The Tabot is a ten-meter-high tower constructed from wood and paper, utilized in a procession through the main streets of Bengkulu city to commemorate the martyrdom of Hasan and Husain, the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, during the Battle of Karbala in Iraq in 61 AH (680 AD). This parade, a Shia heritage tradition in Bengkulu, takes place annually on the 10th of Muharram (Dahri, 2009).

The Tabot tradition comprises nine rituals conducted from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram: taking the soil, Duduk Penja

(washing the fingers), Menjara, Meradai (collecting funds), Arak Penja (parading the fingers), Arak Serban (parading the turban), Gam (quiet mourning), Arak Gedang (Taptu Akbar), and Tabot Terbuang (Astuti, 2016). These rituals symbolize the intricate blend of Islamic and local cultural elements.

Islamic teachings, when adapting to local cultures, give rise to new cultural expressions. The Tabot tradition is a product of such an interaction between Islamic and cultures. In essence, Tabot is a traditional ceremony of the Bengkulu community designed to commemorate the heroism and martyrdom of Husain bin Ali bin Abi Talib, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, in his battle against Ubaidillah bin Zaid's forces on the plains of Karbala, Iraq, on the 10th of Muharram, 61 AH (681 AD). This tradition reflects the influence of Shia elements on Islam in the archipelago. However, it is crucial to note that the Shia tradition in Bengkulu has diverged from its Middle Eastern origins, merging and acculturating with the local Tabot tradition (Maryani, 2018).

Shia emerged as a political group following political upheavals in the Middle East, rooted in differing views on the rightful successor to the caliphate after the Prophet Muhammad. In the Tabot procession, a beautifully adorned tower symbolizes the coffin of Imam Hussein. Prior to its procession through the streets of Bengkulu, a collective prayer is led by the Tabot family, descendants of Imam Senggolo, an Indian scholar who arrived in Bengkulu in the 17th century.

Previous research on Tabot culture has been conducted by several researchers such as

Mersyah (2020) and Dahri (2009). This study employs J. Powel's acculturation theory to examine the Tabot tradition rituals in Bengkulu. This tradition was selected as the research focus to elucidate the forms of acculturation inherent within it. This research is pivotal not only for detailing the forms of acculturation but also for understanding the historical process and significance of Shia cultural acculturation in the Tabot tradition in Bengkulu, along with interpreting the meanings and symbols associated with each ritual.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a library research methodology with a historical approach. It aims to systematically and objectively reconstruct the past by collecting, evaluating, verifying, and synthesizing evidence to derive robust facts and conclusions. The research methodology utilized in this study is descriptive-qualitative, which is particularly suited for exploring the process of cultural acculturation in the Tabot ceremony. This approach was chosen for its capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate social and cultural dynamics at play.

The primary subjects of this research are members of the Tabot families, also known locally in Bengkulu as Kerukunan Keluarga Tabot (KTT). Data collection was conducted through library research, supplemented by field research involving the Tabot Family Harmony (KTT), the custodians of the Tabot tradition.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and

data verification (conclusion drawing). Data reduction involved filtering and categorizing the information collected to emphasize the most pertinent aspects of cultural acculturation. Data presentation organized this information into coherent categories to analysis. facilitate comparative conclusion drawing and verification ensured interpretations were robust accurately reflected the cultural dynamics observed in the Tabot ceremony.

The theoretical framework employed in this study is J. Powell's theory of acculturation, which posits that acculturation occurs when foreign cultural values are into traditional integrated a According to Powell, acculturation involves the gradual incorporation and adaptation of foreign cultural elements into the native culture, resulting in dynamic interactions that preserve the core identity of the native culture. Powell's framework offers a lens through which to analyze the reciprocal influence between Shia traditions and indigenous Bengkulu practices.

Furthermore, Koentjaraningrat's perspective on acculturation is also considered, which describes the process by which a society's culture is influenced by a foreign culture with different characteristics. Over time, elements of the foreign culture are integrated into the native culture without losing its distinct identity and essence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION Understanding Tabot in Bengkulu

Tabot is a towering ten-meter structure crafted from wood and paper, traditionally paraded through the principal streets of Bengkulu city. This procession commemorates the martyrdom of Hasan and Husain, the grandsons of the Prophet Muhammad, who perished in the Battle of Karbala in Iraq in 61 AH (680 AD). The custom of parading the Tabot is a heritage of the Shia sect in Bengkulu and takes place annually on the 10th of Muharram (Murtadlo, 2010).

Constructing a Tabot requires an array of materials, including bamboo, rattan, cardboard, mar-mar paper, grip paper, rope, carving knives, drawing tools, flashlights, decorative lights, paper flowers, and plastic flowers, among other items (Renta, 2011). Given the extensive list of materials, the cost of creating a Tabot ranges between IDR 5,000,000 and IDR 15,000,000. Typically, the Tabot used in the culmination of the ceremony in Bengkulu resembles a mosque's minaret, though its design varies widely (Wulandari, 2024).

The term "Tabot" is derived from the Arabic word tabutu, meaning wooden chest or coffin. This tradition was introduced to Bengkulu by craftsmen from Madras, southern Bengal, India, who were involved in the construction of Fort Marlborough. The practice was subsequently handed down to their descendants, who integrated with the local Bengkulu community (Dahri, 2009). However, the Tabot in Bengkulu is not a coffin in the traditional sense associated with the story of Prophet Moses. Instead, it is a structure reminiscent of a pagoda or mosque minaret, constructed from a wooden frame bamboo. Occasionally, additional elements such as human-headed birds, fish,

traditional houses, and other decorative features are incorporated into the structure.

In summary, Tabot is a ceremonial tradition of the Bengkulu community, commemorating the heroism and martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husain bin Ali bin Abi Talib, in the battle against Ubaidillah bin Zaid's forces at Karbala, Iraq, on the 10th of Muharram 61 Hijri (681 AD) (Padewa, 2022). The celebration was first instituted in Bengkulu by Sheikh Burhanuddin, also known as Imam Senggolo, in 1685. Sheikh Burhanuddin married a local woman, and their descendants, known as the Tabot family, have continued the tradition. This ceremony is observed annually from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram (Mersyah, 2020).

The Origin of the Tabot Ceremony in Bengkulu

The Tabot ceremony, as previously mentioned, fundamentally represents the grief of Shia Muslim families from Bengal (India) over the martyrdom of Husain bin Ali bin Abi Talib at the Battle of Karbala in 61 AH. This ceremony is closely intertwined with the evolution of Islam following the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 11 AH/632 AD in Medina (Dahri, 2009).

Following the death of Ali bin Abi Talib, three factions engaged in a series of conflicts: the faction led by Aisha bint Abu Bakr, the faction led by Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, and the Khawarij faction, all of whom opposed Ali bin Abi Talib (Syaferi, 2024). Aisha's faction instigated the infamous Battle of the Camel but was ultimately defeated by Ali. Subsequently, the forces of Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan engaged in the Battle of Siffin, which

also ended in Ali's victory. Eventually, Ali was assassinated by a member of the Khawarij, Abdurrahman bin Muljam.

After Ali's assassination, Muawiyah ibn Abi Sufyan consolidated his power as caliph, while Ali's loyal followers refused to acknowledge his authority. The Shi'a faction asserted that only Ali and his descendants had the legitimate right to the caliphate, citing his Quraysh lineage and his status as the Prophet's son-in-law (Ridlo, 2022). Consequently, Hasan bin Ali was appointed as his father's successor.

However, Hasan's appointment was fiercely contested by the Umayyads under Muawiyah and later his son, Yazid bin Muawiyah. Hasan bin Ali was eventually poisoned by Yazid's followers (Ahmad, 2022), an event that incited Husayn bin Ali to seek vengeance and restore his family's honor. Husayn rallied his supporters in Kufa to challenge Yazid's rule.

En route to Damascus, Husayn's forces were intercepted by Yazid's troops at Karbala. The ensuing battle lasted ten days, from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram, 61 AH. Despite their valiant efforts, Husayn's smaller force was overwhelmed, culminating in his martyrdom on the 10th of Muharram, an event that the Shi'a commemorate annually (Dahri, 2009).

The Tabot ritual was initially brought from the Arabian Peninsula to regions where Islam was propagated. It entered Punjab, India, before reaching Bengkulu. Propagators from Punjab, led by Maulana Ichsad, and his entourage, including Imam Sobari, Imam Bahar, Imam Suandari, and Imam

Syahbuddin, arrived in Bengkulu in 756/757 AH (1336 AD) (Dahri, 2009). They celebrated the Tabot ritual for ten days, from the end of Dhulhijjah 756 AH to the 10th of Muharram 757 AH, before returning to Punjab.

Although Maulana Ichsad and his group's names are not well-known, Sheikh Burhanuddin (Imam Senggolo) later became a prominent figure in the Tabot tradition in Bengkulu. He continued to propagate the ritual until his death and was buried in Karbelah, Padang Jati Village, Bengkulu City, the current site for Tabot celebrations (Mersyah, 2020). The ritual, passed down through generations, eventually became a traditional practice among Bengkulu residents.

Originally, the essence of the Tabot ceremony was to commemorate the efforts of the Shia leader and his followers who collected and paraded the body of Husain bin Ali bin Abi Talib for burial in Karbala. Although the exact date of the Tabot ritual's introduction to Bengkulu is unknown, it is believed to have been influenced by Shia mourning practices brought by Bengalis the Indians) during (South British construction of Fort Marlborough in 1718-1719 by the Sipai people (Dahri, 2009).

The Tabot ritual also spread to Painan, Padang Pariaman, Maninjau, Pidie, Banda Aceh, Meulaboh, and Singkil. While the ritual has not survived in some of these areas, it continues in Bengkulu City, Bengkulu Province, and Pariaman City, West Sumatra, where it is known as Tabuik (Mersyah, 2020).

Festival and Nine Rituals in Tabot Tradition

During the 10-day period from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram, the entire Tabot procession unfolds (Fitrianah, 2023). The procession begins with the collection of sacred soil on the 1st of Muharram from two revered sites, Tapak Padri and Anggut. The event culminates with a closing procession known as "Tabot Tebuang" on the 10th of Muharram, held at the Karbala Public Cemetery in the Padang Jati area of Bengkulu. This location is chosen due to its significance as the burial place of Imam Senggolo, also known as Sheikh Burhanuddin, who is considered the pioneer of the Tabot ceremony in Bengkulu. This tradition was brought to Bengkulu by the workers who constructed Fort Malborough and has been preserved for two centuries. However, the meaning of the Tabot ceremony has shifted. Originally intended as an expression of mourning by Bengkulu's Shia community for the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husain bin Ali bin Abi Talib, it has now become more of a festive occasion, akin to the Jakarta Fair or other city festivals. For Bengkulu the people of seeking entertainment, the fun and festivities are the primary attraction, overshadowing ritualistic essence of Tabot itself (Dahri, 2009).

The Tabot celebration features various exhibitions and competitions, including fish competitions, telong-telong (lanterns in various shapes), dol music, dance, and other art forms performed by art groups from Bengkulu Province. This has transformed Tabot into a popular entertainment event and

a key tourist attraction on the Bengkulu calendar (Parmadie, 2018). Consequently, the ritual aspects of Tabot have largely become a spectacle. The festival includes a development exhibition and a night market at Merdeka Square in Bengkulu, attracting even more visitors. The Tabot festival, therefore, resembles more a public fair than a cultural event, with the ritual aspect becoming a mere complement.

Firstly, the ceremony of soil retrieval takes place on the night of the 1st of Muharram, around 10 pm. The soil, believed to possess magical properties, is used to make Tabot dolls (Rimapradesi, 2021). The soil is shaped into human-like dolls, wrapped in white shrouds, and placed at the center of Tabot group activities (gerga). The two oldest gerga in Bengkulu are Gerga Berkas and Gerga Bangsal. The sacred soil is collected from Keramat Tapak Padri and Keramat Anggut in Bengkulu. Offerings including sherbet water, curd, sandalwood water, basil water, red and white porridge, red sugar, betel nut, nipah cigarettes, and bitter coffee are also prepared. The soil retrieval symbolizes the origin of humans from the soil and their return to it.

Secondly, the Sitting Penja (Washing Fingers) ritual is performed. Penja refers to fingers, considered by the Sipai people to have magical and sacred elements (Butsainah, 2022). This penja is washed annually with lime water in a ritual known as "Sitting Penja," held on the 5th of Muharram at around 4 pm. The penja, shaped like a human palm and made of brass, silver, or copper, is washed during this event. Offerings such as nasi kebuli, rice cake, golden banana, sugar cane, bitter coffee,

cerobat water, and curd are given. The Sitting Penja ritual symbolizes the importance of self-purification, starting with the hands, which are seen as instruments of both cleanliness and dirt.

Thirdly, Menjara (Visiting) involves visiting another Tabot group for a ji or dol competition. This activity occurs on the 6th and 7th of Muharram from 8 pm to 11 pm. On the 6th of Muharram, the Tabot Bangsal community visits the Tabot Berkas group, and the reverse occurs on the 7th. Menjara symbolizes the journey and processions that represent the preparations for the war in Karbala.

Fourthly, Meradai (Raising Funds) is the collection of funds by jola (children aged 10-12) for community activities (Muhammad, 2012). Held on the 6th of Muharram from 7 am to 5 pm, Meradai aims to awaken communal emancipation.

Fifthly, Arak Penja (Parading the Fingers) is the parade of Tabot fingers through the main streets of Bengkulu city (Rahman, 2022). This event occurs on the night of the 8th of Muharram from 7 pm to 9 pm. Arak Penja symbolizes the five letters of the creator, Allah SWT, a remembrance of Imam Hussein in Karbala, and a symbol of marukun.

Sixthly, Arak Serban (Parading the Turban) is held on the night of the 9th of Muharram from 7 pm to 9 pm, following the same route as Arak Penja (Am, 2022). In addition to the fingers, a white turban is paraded on a small Tabot with banners bearing the names "Hasan and Husain" in Arabic calligraphy. This turban symbolizes the one worn by Imam Hussein, which was

stolen by Akmas bin Mitsat, who went insane after stealing it.

Seventhly, Gam (Calm Mourning) refers to a period of inactivity in the Tabot ceremony (Rochmiatun, 2015). This period lasts from 7 am to 4 pm on the 9th of Muharram, during which all Tabot-related activities, including the sounding of dol and tessa, are halted. Gam symbolizes a day of mourning for the cruel death of Imam Hussein at the hands of Yazid bin Muawiyah.

Eighthly, Arak Gedang (Grand Parade) occurs on the night of the 9th of Muharram at around 7 pm. The besanding tabots are released from their respective headquarters, followed by a grand parade. The procession, involving Tabot groups, entertainment groups, supporters, and the public, converges at Merdeka Square (now Lapangan Tugu Provinsi), where the tabots are placed side by side. This event, known as the peak night, serves as the official closing of the festival.

Finally, Tabot Tebuang (Tabot Wasted) takes place at 9 am on the 10th of Muharram. All the tabots gather at Merdeka Square, accompanied by entertainment groups. At around 11 am, the procession moves to the Karbala Public Cemetery. The ritual concludes at the tomb of Imam Senggolo, led by the oldest Tabot shaman, where the tabot structure is discarded into the adjacent swamps at around 1:30 pm, marking the end of the ceremony.

In line with other Islamic rituals, all Tabot ceremony activities begin with the recitation of the *basmalah*, inspired by Prophet Muhammad's saying, "Every practice that does not begin with *basmalah* will not get a

blessing and will be cut off from Allah's grace." In the Tabot ritual, the basmalah is always followed by prayers (Mersyah, 2020). Prayer holds a significant position in Islamic teachings, akin to the brain in the human body, as emphasized by the Prophet's words, "Al-du'a mukhkhul ibadah" (prayer is the brain of worship). Without prayer, worship becomes meaningless. Common prayers recited during the Tabot ritual include prayers for the grave, prayers for safety and forgiveness for the souls of Muslims, tasbih, shalawat ulul azmi, shalawat wasilah, and others. The essence of Tabot Tebuang is to eliminate vices, pride, and ignorance while commemorating Imam Hussein, who was martyred in Karbala.

Values Derived from the Tabot Ritual

The Tabot ceremony encapsulates three core values: religious (sacred), historical, and social. The religious values embedded in the Tabot ceremony are illustrated through several key actions: Firstly, the act of taking soil serves as a reminder of the origins of human creation. Secondly, the incorporation of mantras and holy verses in the soil collection procession underscores the inseparable bond between religion and local cultural values. Thirdly, the Tabot ceremony is conducted as a celebration to mark the Islamic New Year.

The historical value inherent in the Tabot tradition commemorates the love and reverence for the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husain bin Ali, who perished in the Battle of Karbala. It also reflects a broader sentiment of hostility towards the Umayyah dynasty, particularly

against Yazid bin Muawiyah, the reigning caliph at the time, and Governor Ubaidillah bin Ziyad, who commanded the attack on Husain bin Ali and his forces.

Socially, the Tabot tradition serves as a poignant reminder of the ethical implications of pursuing power by any means necessary, symbolizing a collective social conscience. This ceremony offers numerous values of wisdom that can serve as guiding principles in life. However, if approached without proper reverence, the Tabot ceremony risks devolving into merely another cultural festivity, vibrant in execution but devoid of its profound spiritual essence.

Shia Traces in the Tabot Ritual

The Shia sect emerged as a political faction following the Middle Eastern political turmoil, which was sparked by divergent views on the rightful successor to the caliphate after the Prophet Muhammad. Their quest to establish supreme political authority faced strong opposition from the Umayyad dynasty, culminating in the tragic death of the Prophet's grandson, Husayn ra., at Karbala (Maryani, 2018). The manifestation of Shia in Bengkulu differs significantly from its counterparts in India or Persia. In Bengkulu, Shia influences are more subtle and integrated into the prevailing Islamic practices, which are predominantly Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah. Consequently, many might be unaware that Tabot tradition incorporates elements. While Shia identity often involves acts of self-mortification, within the Tabot tradition, the emphasis shifts commemorating the martyrdom of Husayn ra.

Imam Senggolo, also known as Sheikh Burhanuddin, a cleric of the Shia sect, introduced this Shia cultural element to Bengkulu. The Tabot families remain committed to upholding the Tabot traditions, believing that failure to do so would invite calamities upon them. Conversely, adhering to these traditions is thought to protect them from such misfortunes (Manulu, 1994). The Sipai people's migration to Bengkulu not only resulted in intermarriage but also introduction of their customs to the local Tabot populace. The celebration, procession initially practiced in South India, was enthusiastically adopted by the local community upon its introduction.

CONCLUSION

Acculturation, defined as the process wherein two cultures converge and each culture assimilates the values it brings forth, embodies a fusion without forsaking the original cultural values. It denotes the gradual integration of foreign elements into the indigenous culture without eradicating its essence. Therefore, acculturation transpires when a societal group interacts with a foreign culture, embracing and amalgamating foreign elements while preserving its original cultural identity. In essence, acculturation signifies the infusion of a foreign cultural paradigm into a traditional local milieu.

Regarding the Tabot ceremony, it symbolizes a traditional rite practiced by the populace of Bengkulu, commemorating the valorous narrative of the demise of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein bin Ali bin Abi Talib, in combat with Ubaidillah bin Zaid's forces in Padang Karbala, Iraq, on the

10th of Muharram, 61 Hijri (681 AD). Initiated by Sheikh Burhanuddin, renowned as Imam Senggolo, in 1685, the inaugural Tabot festivity marks the union between Sheikh Burhanuddin and a Bengkulu native, progenitors of the Tabot lineage. This annual event unfolds from the 1st to the 10th of Muharram.

Originally a Shia Islamic rite, the Tabot ceremony underwent transformation due to the prevailing influence of Sunni Islam in Bengkulu, leading the descendants of Shia Islamic propagators to adopt Sunni Islam fervently. Despite this conversion, they continue to observe the Tabot Ritual as a "universal Islamic religious rite" asserting the intrinsic doctrinal harmony between Shia and Sunni Islam. Consequently, they uphold the Tabot Ritual as an imperative to safeguard and perpetuate ancestral heritage.

The Tabot ceremony transcends its familial origins to become a pivotal regional heritage. Comprising nine rituals, each laden with narrative and historical significance, the tradition unfolds over nine days, elucidating Shia traditions, particularly the saga of Imam Hussein's martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala.

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