

# Memorialization of war between conflicts of interest before and after the Islamic Revolution: public art and public space in Iran

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# MEMORIALIZATION OF WAR BETWEEN CONFLICTS OF INTEREST BEFORE AND AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION: PUBLIC ART AND PUBLIC SPACE IN IRAN

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## ABSTRACT

Since 1800s, numerous wars have impacted the cities of Iran. Regarding the urban artwork in Tehran, the capital of Iran, the following question comes to mind: What approach has the urban artwork adopted to represent the war and its related concepts? Adopting a documentary research approach and investigating the concept of war in different eras, this paper attempts to study the sculptures in urban spaces as documents. Based on the books and historical documents, a total of 192 sculptures, which were built from the Qajar dynasty to 2016 have been examined in this study. During the Qajar dynasty, the governments have used sculptures, especially the ones placed in city squares, to demonstrate their power. After the Constitutional Revolution, figures denoting concepts of justice and freedom became pervasive in the squares up until the end of the Pahlavi dynasty. After the Islamic Revolution, the Iran-Iraq war has been called Sacred Defense and the goal of creating statues has been changed to express revolutionary and ideological concepts. Figurative sculptures and busts have been made as a tribute to the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war.

## KEYWORDS

Sculpture | Urban art | War | Urban space | Tehran

## INTRODUCTION

During the Qajar dynasty (1794-1925) and after the time when Qajar kings traveled to European countries, such as France (1870s), the kings became eager on utilizing sculptures in urban spaces as a sign of modernity. In Iran, art reflects the society and social events. Iran's engagement in various wars over the course of the history brings the following questions to mind: How war as a social reality has been reflected in the urban sculptures of Tehran? And what differences are there in the sculptures with regard to their themes and contents? In Iran, war has had an impact on political, economic, social, cultural, and artistic spheres either directly or indirectly. Iran has been engaged with this issue after the Qajar dynasty. There are several examples: the first period of Russia-Persian wars from 1805 to 1813 during Fath-Ali Shah's reign; the second period of the war with the Russians from 1826 to 1828 after the Russians violated the Treaty of Gulistan and the Iranian clergymen decreed Jihad against them; Ottoman-Persian wars from 1821 to 1823; Siege of Herat from 1838 to 1839 during Muhammad Shah's reign; Naser al-Din Shah's war against the Khawrezmians in 1855; the

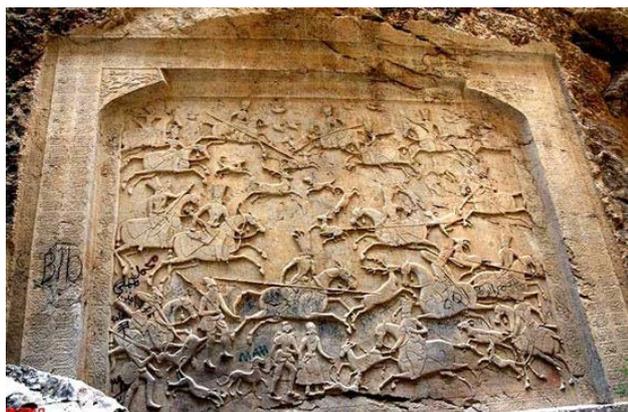
Anglo-Persian war from 1856 to 1857 followed by Iran's attacking to Herat for the second time; the Battle of Merv after which Russians took control of some of the eastern regions of Iran; regional wars during Muhammad Ali Shah in 1906; civil wars after the Constitutional Revolution until Muhammad Ali Shah's dethronement; Russian's military expedition from 1909 to 1910; the Second World War in 1942; the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty; and the Iran-Iraq war from 1981 to 1989 during the Islamic Republic.

The aim of this study is to answer the question that how the urban artworks, particularly sculptures, in Tehran are adopted to represent the war and its related concepts. Using a documentary research approach and investigating the concept of war in different eras, this paper attempts to study the sculptures in urban spaces as documents. Based on the books and historical documents, a total of 192 sculptures, which were built from the Qajar dynasty to 2016 have been examined in this study.

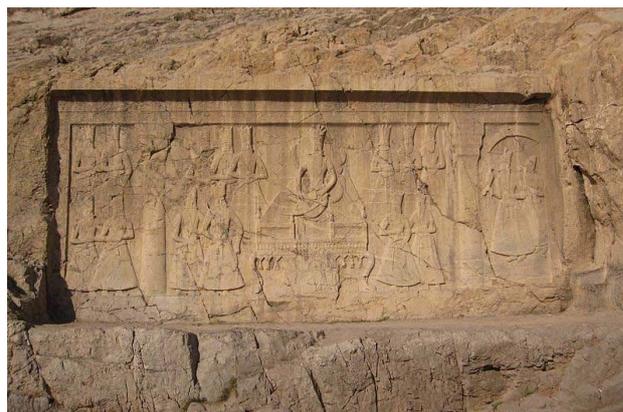
## AN INVESTIGATION ON WORLD-WIDE WAR MEMORIAL

By reviewing memorialization in different western countries, the representations of Martin Luther King, Jr. in public art, from 1967 until the present, in the United States can be interesting. Flanagan and Concannon (2017) showed that the depictions of Martin Luther King, Jr. have changed since his death. They believe that before King's death, African American communities thought his methods of activism ineffective, and the government did not hail him as a hero. After Dr. King's death, representations of him in public art differ dramatically depending on the artist or patron, and reflect a version of King that serves the politics of those creating the mural or monument. Most often, this means a positive portrayal of King's work and activism as private citizens hail him as a martyr and government commissions promote his non-violent method of activism.

In a research on the global memory of Lebanon, Haugbolle (2010) investigates the culture of memory work evolving in civil society after fifteen years of bloody civil war. He argues about how to relate the past in public debates, legal processes and cultural production are rife with moral tensions between sub-national perspectives and global scripts for "best practices" of how to "do" memory: how to apologize, atone, remember in public and transform collective memories. Because the Lebanese civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 drew in a host of international and regional powers, was heavily covered in the international media and thus became emblematic of state fracture, the lingering memories from that war and the question of how to deal with it have multiple stakeholders and audiences in Lebanon, from deprived communities struggling with aftereffects such as post-traumatic stress disorder and physical destruction, to politicians and



(a)



(b)

**Fig. 01** (a) To commemorate the hunts of Fath Ali Shah, a rock carving in the midway located in the touristic area in the northeast of the Alborz Mountain (b) a rock relief in Cheshemi-Ali, in the south of Tehran, the religious-touristic area of Ray (Photograph of rock relief by Narciss M.Sohrabi)

activists articulating strategies and policies of how to deal, or not to deal, with the past. Several researchers have focused on the mediators of culture—such as the “memory makers” in Lebanon on the economic support for cultural transfer (funding bodies) and the strategies involved on both the recipient and the “exporting” side—as crucial aspects of cultural transfer (Espagne and Werner, 1987; Joyeux-Prunel, 2003).

As another case, David (2017) in the “Lost in Transaction in Serbia and Croatia: Memory Content as a Trade Currency” emphasizes on the series of memorialization standards that promote Western memorial models as a template for the representation of past tragedies or mass crimes. These guidelines require states with difficult and contested pasts to adhere to certain prescribed standards of memory. Those standards are “commonly understood in terms of commemoration, the non-recurrence of

violence and symbolic forms of reparations. While both Croatia and Serbia institutionalized and instrumentalized Holocaust remembrance as proof of good behavior in the hope of gaining benefits in the long run from the EU, it is a standard that needs to be preserved but is not likely to bring new benefits. Thus, the value of memory changes in relation to supply and demand within both the international and local arenas.

According to Buchenhorst (2017), instead of modeling its memory on a foreign discourse linked to clearly defined national borders, Argentine civil society absorbed elements of a larger cosmopolitan politics of memory, especially from Shoah remembrance. He believes that ethnic and national conflicts are being conceived as human rights violations, but existential divisions and generational discrepancies in how to approach the memory of such conflicts cannot be ignored.

## URBAN ART AND WAR MEMORIAL IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN

There are numerous sculptures in Tehran in comparison with others cities in Iran. There are two approaches evident in Tehran’s sculptures with regard to the subject of war: first, war as a real issue and its political realities; and second, war as a notional issue through which ideological concepts and values have been advocated

after the Islamic Revolution. During the Qajar dynasty, cannons were used as a city beautification technique for the first time. The cannons, as the first urban sculptures, are considered a form of art in public spaces, before figurative sculptures, emulating the west, became prevalent. The cannons were either relics of the war

cannons which had been stripped of their military use or made only for exhibition purposes, such as Morvarid (=pearl) Cannon. Various versions of stories about cannons have been narrated, one of which was the one put into words by Carla Serena. In her travelogue, she states, “... around this square [Toopkhaneh], there are some arches and there is a cannon in each of them... There are cone-shaped balls with different sizes next to each cannon. To pleasing the king and the residents of the capital, the balls were colored like a rainbow. The coloring idea was put forth by the head of the armory who wanted to put the rusty iron into good use, to decorate the square. It has been said that this type of decoration was according to the idea of the Secretary of War whose purpose of such display of Iran’s weaponry was to make the representatives of foreign countries fear Tehran.” Because of the weakness of the Iranian army against rival nations, due to the presence of the European military teachers in Iran and also Iran’s ammunition deficiency, I believe that the installation of such figures were an attempt to induce power.

After traveling to Europe and visiting museums and seeing the statue of the kings on horses in the city squares, Naser Al-Din Shah (1831-1896) became fond of figurative sculptures and ordered the Minister of Industry (Iqbal Al-Saltana) to make his sculpture on a horseback. This incident might not be directly linked to the concept of war; however, it is linked with cavalry and power display. This theme has always existed in Iranian culture. As it is evident in the remaining artworks and reliefs, the statues of kings on horsebacks were a symbol of their power and conquest [Fig. 01].

Regarding the construction of statues, busts, and sculptures, there are some laws in Islam which prohibit their construction. The notable pre-Islamic sculptures that have remained were built during Parthian and Sassanid periods. During the Achaemenid period, the artworks were in the form of stone carvings. Because of the semantic and structural similarities between statues and idols, there has been a notable decline in statue

making in the Islamic era. There are numerous hadiths and anecdotes in the sharia that verify this notion. In Quran, there are four verses that deal with the issue of casting. For example, He is Allah, the Creator, the Inventor, the Fashioner; He has created the heavens and the earth in just proportions, and has given you shape, and made your shapes beautiful. Nevertheless, during the Islamic period there have been contradictory interpretations of icons; some clergies consider it licit while others consider it illicit. For example, Sheikh Toosi in Tebyan, Tabarsi in Majma Al Bayan, Ibn Jozi in Zad Al Masir, Zomokhshari in Alkeshaf, Beyzavi in Tafsire-Beyzavi, Sheikh Kelini in Alkafi, and Hossein-Ibn-Masood Baghvi in Maalem al tanzil have presented different interpretations of the terms icon. Generally, in all four Sunni schools<sup>1</sup>, making lifeless, solid objects is permissible. In Shiite, it is acceptable to make non-living creatures if certain criteria are met.

Upon visiting France, Naser Al-Din Shah became infatuated with European sculptures and wanted to install similar statues in Toopkhane Square, the main square of the city; however, because of people’s bias and fear of the clergymen, he decided to install them in the courtyard of the King’s Garden, which was under military control. About the unveiling of this sculpture, Etemad Al-Saltana in his 1967 memoir states, “Today is the sculpture feast day. The royal sculpture was made of cast iron. They have done a fine job. Due to the shortage of tools, it was difficult to build the sculpture. There was no need for a ceremony. Building such a sculpture in the Islamic state is Haram [What is prohibited in Islam]; however, since the king is powerful, he can do as he wishes. But there are those biased people who do not concur. If it had been up to me, I would have prevented the ceremony (1967:597)”.

This is evidence for the fact that the figurative statue’s contradiction with the Sharia did not stop the king from demonstrating his power through the sculpture. It was the first time a sculpture was made by an Iranian architect — Mirza Ali Akbar Khan.

1. In terms of Islamic religious jurisprudence, Sunnism contains four main schools of thought including: Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi’I and Hanbali.



**Fig. 02-** Sculpture of Reza Shah in the Rah Ahan Square in the south of Tehran. Source: Archive of Tehran municipality.



(a)



(b)

**Fig. 03-** (a) Statue of Reza shah in the Sepah Square (b) Statue of the fight between Garshasp and a dragon, in the Horr Square, this artwork was commemorating Azerbaijan's rescue from the Soviet occupation. Source: Archive of Tehran municipality.

## SCULPTURES AS URBAN ARTWORKS IN PAHLAVI PERIOD

In the beginning of Pahlavi period (1925), the sculpture was taken down to be melted and used in making weapons, ordered by the mayor- Bouzarjmevri. During the Pahlavi's reign, because of the diminishing of the Sharia, the number of sculptors, especially in city squares, increased. After Naser Al-Din Shah's statue was melted, "there were no statues of the kings until 1936. Hence, the municipality commissioned the French sculptor- Auguste Mailland, to build the king's statues. The statues were placed in three important locations of the city, namely, Rah Ahan (Railway) Square, Sepah Square, and the newly constructed square in Karaj Highway." Rah Ahan Square is in front of Tehran's train station in the south of Tehran [Fig. 02].

The station itself had a modern architecture, as did the square in front of it. The square is located in the southernmost part of Vali-Asr Street, Iran's longest street with a length of 17.5 kilometers, which continues to Tajrish Square in the north of Tehran.

After the Islamic Revolution, Sepah (or Toopkhane) Square was renamed Imam Khomeini Square. This place is one of the historical squares in Iran which was used for governmental, political, and administrative

purposes. Nowadays, the plaza, being close to Tehran's main market, is used for trade purposes. The statues placed in Sepah and Rah Ahan squares have the same old cavalry structures, being the only difference the use of historical concepts furthermore military themes; for example, the statue in Sepah Square has four Achaemenid soldiers in its column [Fig. 03(a)].

In addition to the cavalry statues, which denote a classical image of the ruling party power, after the Constitutional Revolution, adopting a western approach, revolutionary concepts such as freedom and justice were advocated in statue making. During Muhammad Reza Pahlavi's reign, a statue was built depicting the fight between Garshasp and a dragon (*Mobareziei Gharshaseb va Ejadeha*), commemorating Azerbaijan's rescue from the Soviet occupation. The statue is currently placed in Horr Square in Tehran. The monument shows a dragon at the feet of a soldier and a civilian [Fig. 03(b)].

Another example of such sculptures is the one installed in Mokhber al Doleh Square after the 1953 Iranian coup d'état. The statue was named after Mokhber al Doleh who had helped a lot in the coup; the square was also named after him. Upon the Islamic Revolution,

the statue was taken down. It is worth mentioning that in this period there were sculptures related to the concepts of everyday life placed in parks, cultural centers, and the forecourts of theaters and museums.

The approach of focusing on ancient Persia, which can be rooted in the ideas put forth by the "National Heritage Association", can be traced in the four-headed sword-wielding lions at the entrance of the National Council Parliament (1958) and the Triumphal Arch with reliefs illustrating a fight between a cow and a lion, which was built on the occasion of Eisenhower's visit to Iran (1960). Sword-wielding lion was the symbol of Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979).

Governmental statues, in this period, were placed in public spaces of cities. Influenced by the war and the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911), the sculptures of this period can be categorized into two groups: first, the statues that show bravery, military power,

hegemony, and authoritarianism of political leaders such as cannons, sculptures of figures and cavalries; and second, iconic statues which have a mythical characteristic and at the same time demonstrate the battle over freedom and justice by employing weapons such as spear and sword. The statues installed in this period were carved figures of Reza Shah and Muhammad Reza Shah. These statues had a political agenda. For this reason, Iran's Intelligence Agency (Savak) monitored the construction and installation of the statues in different cities. The statues had to be impeccable so that they would be a demonstration of solidarity between people as a result of the royal ideology. The environment in which the statues were supposed to be installed had to be flawless because the statues were considered as the illustrations of the regime. The more favorable environment of the statue would implicate that the structure and ideology of the statue has led to the progress of the environment. The statues were taken down after the Islamic Revolution.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF ISLAMIC LAW AND THE CHALLENGES IN FRONT OF URBAN ART

We can conceptualize different important stages in this period. In the first stage (1979-1980), the transition and consolidation of power was done and the newly appointed Islamic government strived to implement the Islamic laws accurately and completely. As stated above, some of the Islamic laws prevented the sculptors from making statues. Due to the unstable condition of the new government, religious prohibitions, and the notion that statues were reminiscent of the previous regime, no statues were built in this stage. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), because of the closure of universities and the fact that making sculptures was a time consuming process in comparison with other forms of visual art such as murals, statue production was stopped.

After the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, the concept of war was redefined based on the Islamic ideologies. Before the revolution, war connoted invasion and fight for ambitious or aggressive purposes; however, after the revolution war was redefined based on Islamic ideologies and was referred to as Sacred Defense.

In this period, revolutionary views and values such as courage, dedication, loyalty, and sacrifice entered the war, and war was renamed to *Jihad*. War for ambitious purposes was considered secular and profane. A fatalistic interpretation of war with an emphasis on *Ashura* (a tragic religious event at 680 A.D.) was presented in this period. The importance of human values had a profound effect on the formation of a moral, value-based approach to war. War was seen as a personal and moral conduct. It is noteworthy that in spite of the ban, some sculptures were produced denoting concepts such as revolution and martyrdom, a famous example of which is the statues placed in the Enghelab (=Revolution) Square in 1983 [Fig. 04].

*"This statue was a round relief depicting the role of different groups of people participating in the protests and the revolution. In this statue, there was an emphasis on the role of women and different ethnicities. Imam Khomeini's hand was extraordinarily large as a symbol of his leadership and support during and after the revolution"*



Fig. 04. A statue in the Revolution Square, as a round relief depicting the role of different groups of people. Source: Archive of Tehran municipality.

(Eskandari, 2016). During the war, not only realistic and figurative statues were considered as a symbol of the previous regime, but also the sculptors were faced with the Islamic ban on making life-like statues; hence, symbolic revolutionary elements such as tulips, birds, and pigeons were used. The statues representing symbolic revolutionary elements were installed in city squares. In this period, the sculpture that remained from the former regime, but did not promote the Pahlavi doctrine, were reinterpreted in the light of Islamic and revolutionary concepts. For instance, the Bagh Shah Square in which the sculptures of Garshasb and a dragon were built to commemorate Azerbaijan's freedom was renamed to Horr Square<sup>2</sup>. To many of the viewers, the sculptures are reminiscent of *Karbala* — where the *Ashura* event took place.

From 1989 to 2002, measures were taken to stabilize statuary as a form of art to serve the war and revolutionary concepts. After a rather long break in sculpting, in 1989,

Taher Shikh al Hokamii in a note titled "statuary in isolation" stated, "*In our revolutionary country, most people in the society ask what statuary is. And why has this art become stagnated in spite of its potential to further the goals of the revolution? We believe that sculpting can have a positive impact on the society and save people's values and ideals*" (Sheikh al Hokamii, 1989 :32). In 1989, statuary regains its status as a form of revolutionary art. With all these efforts, finally in 1992, the statue of Palestine Square, depicting human body, made by three artists "Memarian", "Qashqai", and "Garoosyan" was built [Fig. 05(a)]; however, the break still continued until 1994 when the field of statuary became recognized and accepted students.

Also in this period, the first urban statue of the revolutionary activist, the martyr Ayatollah Modarres, was installed in Baharestan Square in 1997 [Fig. 05(b)]. The statue was built by Malek Dadyar Garoosyan and Nader Qashqai.

2. Horr was one of the soldiers of Hussain ibn Ali in event who later became the symbol of freedom.



(a)



(b)

**Fig. 05.** (a) Statue as a form of revolutionary art in Palestine Square as the first figurative artwork after Islamic Revolution, (b) the first urban statue of the revolutionary activist, the martyr Ayatollah Modarres. Source: Archive of Tehran municipality.

The period of 1989-2002 is known for the establishment of urban sculptures on the theme of war and revolution. There have been four symposiums on the martyr statues in Tehran since 2002. The first three symposiums dealt with building the head of the martyrs and the fourth was dedicated to memorial artworks. In this period, as mentioned above, through the concepts of revolution and the redefinition of the notion of war, making statues, busts, and torsos of the martyrs was a way to pay tribute to their bravery. It is worth mentioning that those revolutionary activists and commanders who were killed during missions or in terrorist attacks were also considered martyrs, not just those who died in Iran-Iraq war (such as martyrs Fahmideh, Jahan-Ara, and Hemat).

In Velayat Park, 20 busts of the martyrs of the war and revolution were installed in June 2012 coinciding with the Liberation of Khoramshahr [Fig. 06]. There are busts or torsos of martyrs in streets, highways, or squares which carry the name of those martyrs. Another approach adopted by the sculptors was making symbolic sculptures using elements such as tulips, cypress, and pigeons and also the colors red, black,

and white to depict concepts of bravery and resistance [Fig. 07]. In addition, in this period we are facing a third approach in which sculptors adopted an abstract and modern approach to promote revolutionary concepts. In general, the features of the sculptures in this period in terms of the techniques used to build them, their subject matter, and display location can be categorized into: using symbolic elements such as cypress, pigeon, flight, hand (in memorial of Abbas ibn Ali). There has always been a patriarchal perspective in sculpture building. In spite of women's influential role during the war (there were 3500 female martyrs in Iran-Iraq war), there are no figurative female statues or symbolic or memorial elements. The scarcity of female statues cannot be attributed to the Islamic laws since there are statues of well-known females such as Parvin E'tesami in Tehran.

As a result, comparison of figurative and symbolic sculptures with war and fight subjects in Tehran, from the beginning of the Qajar dynasty until 2010 is shown in Table 1.

After the Constitutional and the Islamic Revolutions, the concept of war manifested in Tehran's urban statues



Fig. 06- Statues and busts of the martyrs of the revolution and war in the different parts of Tehran like Velayat Park, streets, highways and squares. Source: Archive of Tehran municipality.



Fig. 07- Figurative Statue using symbolic elements such as cypress, pigeon, flight. Source: Archive of Tehran municipality.

**tab.01**

**THE COMPARISON OF FIGURATIVE AND SYMBOLIC SCULPTURES WITH WAR AND FIGHT SUBJECTS IN TEHRAN, FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE QAJAR DYNASTY UNTIL 2010**

Feature	Time Period	
	Before the Islamic Revolution	After the Islamic Revolution
Figurative Statue	Emphasis on the authority and military power of the kings (Mythical approach)	Honoring the martyrs without directly referring to the war and its realities (Epic approach)
Figurative sculpture	Representing the concept of freedom using iconic elements	Representing ideological and revolutionary concepts using symbolic elements
Location	Square	Until the 1980s: Square After the 1980s: Sculptures and busts in parks and side of the highways/monuments and abstract elements in squares

## CONCLUSIONS

has changed from a reality which emphasized battles, victory, and power to a notion in which defending revolutionary concepts and human values have been highlighted. In both of the periods under investigation, honoring commanders and soldiers through figurative sculptures was advocated. However, it should be noted that before the Islamic Revolution the statues were built to lionize the kings as commanders in chief while the post Islamic Revolution sculptures advocated ideological concepts of bravery, resistance, and perseverance utilizing abstract forms and symbolic colors such as red, black, and white. Martyrs' statues do not reflect the war directly; they have been built to honor the martyrs with an epic approach. Also in both periods the revolutionary concepts, affected by both the Constitutional and Islamic Revolutions, in the statues are presented symbolically; nonetheless, the pre-Islamic Revolution statues were mythical in nature and had a direct reference to war by incorporating the battles with dragons and the use of swords and spears.

These statues represented the concept of freedom. The post-Islamic Revolution statues utilize a symbolic and poetic approach to represent ideological concepts of resistance, bravery, and perseverance. These statues employ symbols such as tulip, cypress, pigeon, and flight and colors red, black, and white to represent war.

In addition to the differences in the definition of war in the two periods, the location where the statues were displayed also differed. Before the Islamic Revolution, the statues were based on European models and their subject matters were chosen to promote the regime; therefore, they were installed in city squares to be seen by the passerby. After the Islamic Revolution, the figurative statues remaining from the previous regime were broken down. The newly built figurative statues, due to their large size, were placed in parks and other public spaces. Furthermore, monuments and abstract elements are usually placed in the city squares.

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