

## Nuncio Giuseppe Mojoli's Malta experience<sup>1</sup>

*Sergio Grech*

Due to new documentation, one can reveal that the Vatican's Nuncio to Malta, Archbishop Giuseppe Mojoli (1905-1980), had an unpleasant tenure of office between 1969 and 1971. It clearly emerges that whilst in office, Nuncio Mojoli felt sad, solitary, lonely and often demotivated with little or no work to perform. As a result, he devoted much of his energy on studying the role of the Vatican Representation in Malta. In fact, he came to the conclusion that there was no need for a full-time Nuncio for Malta. The appointment of a non-resident Nuncio would have been the right route to follow. Mgr Mojoli was also troubled by the fact that the Nuncio in Malta had inadequate residence facilities and he therefore forwarded plans for the foundation and the building of a permanent nunciature. But it appears that his plan was met with doubts and scepticism by the concerned parties who dubbed the idea as being "*eccessiva*" and "*inutile*."<sup>2</sup> During the Malta posting, Archbishop Mojoli also embarked on an autobiographical work in which he recorded his nuncial experiences in Ethiopia. The book was published in 1973, and a copy is deposited at the Library of the University of Malta.<sup>3</sup> To make matters worse, during his Malta stay, his sister had succumbed to a fall and he had to visit her frequently to follow her recovery. This fact too may have negatively affected his morale.

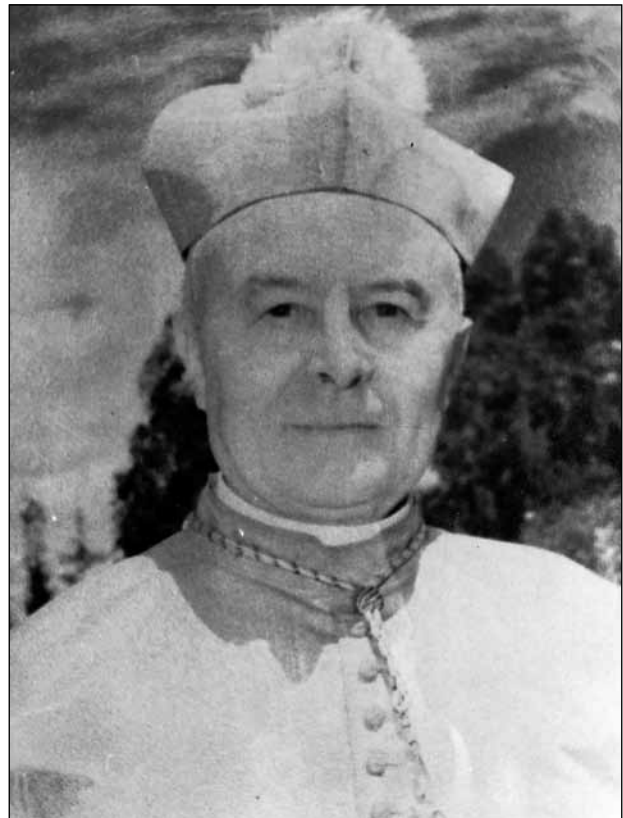
### *Archbishop Giuseppe Mojoli*

Archbishop Giuseppe Mojoli was born on 31 August 1905 in Covo, a municipality in the province of Bergamo.<sup>4</sup> He took Holy Orders on 18 March 1928. On 27 September 1960, at the age of 55, he was appointed Apostolic Internuncio to Ethiopia,<sup>5</sup> while on

28 October of the same year he was ordained Titular Archbishop of Larissa in Thessalia. Mgr Mojoli represented Pope John XXIII at Uganda's Independence Celebrations.<sup>6</sup> On 14 November 1969, Archbishop Mojoli was appointed Apostolic Nuncio to Malta. He retired twenty-five months later on reaching retirement age. His uncle Don Giuseppe Mojoli was a famous parish priest in the Bergamasco province and a Biblical scholar. According to Nuncio Mojoli, "*il modernismo lo mise fuori combattimento*".

### *The Mojoli-Ligutti correspondence*

The main sources used for this study form part of the Monsignor Luigi Ligutti Papers archived at the Raynor Memorial Libraries



*Mgr Giuseppe Mojoli*

within the Marquette University, a Catholic Jesuit-run tertiary institution in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Papers were donated to the mentioned university by Archbishop Luigi Ligutti himself in 1976. In 1967, Archbishop Ligutti was appointed Apostolic Visitor with the mandate to scrutinise property management by the Malta Church during the period that Mgr Mojoli was in Malta.<sup>7</sup>

This study is based on the correspondence that Archbishop Mojoli and Archbishop Ligutti exchanged privately between them. At times Mojoli gave detailed presentations in his letters regarding the role of the Nuncio in Malta whilst Ligutti was more succinct in his thoughts and, when it came to writing, he was often non-committal preferring to stick to his original mandate as Apostolic Visitor.<sup>8</sup>

Most probably, the Nuncio regarded the Apostolic Visitor as a beacon of hope. He definitely trusted him to the point that, for instance, he found no difficulty in passing on to Ligutti secret pro-memoria that he had written for Cardinal Giovanni Benelli, the Vatican Secretary of State. This he did so as to keep him abreast of developments. In his turn, Archbishop Ligutti used to log the date and time, in English, when the documents were given to him. Both employed Italian as their medium of writing.

In early March of 1971, the Vatican surprised the Nuncio by suspending the Ligutti mission from Malta. Such a controversial decision led to a decrease in the flow of correspondence between both sides, and very few letters were exchanged after that decision. In one of these letters Ligutti invited Mojoli to visit him at his home in Rome, "*ove spezzeremo il pane fraterno*".<sup>9</sup>

During Ligutti's frequent visits to Malta, the two prelates met and discussed further the issues that were dear to them. The modes of address tended to vary from one letter to another, and the writers used various phrases like *Caro Monsignore*,<sup>10</sup> *Eccellenza*,<sup>11</sup> *Caro Monsignor Ligutti*,<sup>12</sup> and so on.

Archbishop Mojoli seemed to prefer being less formal than Ligutti. The majority of the letters were hand-written. Mojoli wrote his letters from Malta and from Martinengo (province of Bergamo), where his sister resided. Mgr Ligutti wrote his letters from his residence in Largo Guanella, in Rome. Mojoli used to spend the Easter and Christmas holidays at Martinengo.

### *The opening of an Apostolic Nunciature in Malta*

Following Independence in 1964, Malta embarked on the ambitious project of running a ministry for foreign affairs and opening embassies and consulates. That was a totally new scenario for Malta. When the island was a colony, Foreign Affairs were in the hands of the colonial masters and Malta had to subject itself to what the Secretary of State for the Colonies dictated. According to a report drawn up by Archbishop Mojoli in 1969, there were in Malta nine permanent Diplomatic Representations, that is to say Italy, France, West Germany, Great Britain, the United States of America, Australia, Libya, Israel and China.<sup>13</sup> A further twenty-two countries were accredited to Malta but had their mission either in Rome or in London.<sup>14</sup>



*Mgr Michael O'Connor, first Apostolic Nuncio to Malta, on a visit to Prime Minister George Borg Olivier*

By 1966 Malta and the Vatican had exchanged their respective diplomats.<sup>15</sup> The first Nuncio to Malta was Mgr Michael O'Connor.<sup>16</sup> He was appointed on 15 December 1965. Archbishop O'Connor had to literally start from scratch.<sup>17</sup> Before Independence, Malta had depended on the Apostolic Delegation in London.

Mgr O'Connor was a non-resident Nuncio notwithstanding the fact that during his term of office there were important issues that risked rocking the local Church and that he had to tackle, such as the finalisation of the peace accord between the Malta Church and the Malta Labour Party, the appointment of Archbishop Emanuel Gerada as Malta's Auxiliary Bishop, the appointment of Bishop Nikol Cauchi as Gozo's Apostolic Administrator *sede plena* and the Vatican's investigation in the management of the Church's estate. Meanwhile, Nuncio O'Connor also kept his post as President of the *Pontificia Commissione per le Comunicazioni Sociali*.

At a later stage, Archbishop Mojoli would use the O'Connor *modus operandi* as a proof that Malta should have had a non-resident Nuncio. According to the notes kept by Mgr Mojoli, O'Connor visited Malta thirteen times during his term of office.<sup>18</sup>

Archbishop O'Connor was succeeded by Archbishop Saverio Zupi who never came to Malta since he was forced to resign due to illness. In fact, he resigned after only six months in office. Mgr Zupi had quite an impressive diplomatic career representing the Holy See in Korea, Pakistan and Turkey.<sup>19</sup>

### *The appointment of Archbishop Mojoli as Malta's third Nuncio*

Mgr Giuseppe Mojoli arrived in Malta at a crucial juncture. As stated earlier, the Holy See had sent Archbishop Luigi Ligutti to Malta in 1969 on Archbishop Gonzi's request for assistance with regard to the reorganisation of the Church's property in Malta. The Malta Church was busy restructuring its institutions as demanded

by the Second Vatican Council, but many were sceptical that those changes were leaving a pastoral impact.<sup>20</sup>

The relationship between Archbishop Gonzi and Archbishop Gerada was verging on the impossible. As a result, divisions, rifts and factions within the local clergy worsened. A group of local ecclesiastics were also insisting that Archbishop Gonzi's time was up and that he had to relinquish his seat in favour of a younger bishop. The Malta Church also made disastrous financial decisions that ultimately affected its income quite badly.

Contrary to his predecessors, Archbishop Mojoli was given the mandate to serve as a resident Nuncio. Immediately on taking up his position he was struck by the fact that a full-time Nuncio in Malta had practically nothing or very little to occupy himself with. On a number of instances in his letters sent to Ligutti, he referred to "*pochissimo lavoro*". In one particular letter that Mojoli wrote to Ligutti, he remarked: "*il moltissimo da fare riguarda Lei non me!*"<sup>21</sup> He argued that even Mgr O'Connor, who had been a non-resident Nuncio, had faced



*Mgr Luigi Ligutti*

([www.findagrave.com/memorial/14654732/luigi-g-ligutti%202](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/14654732/luigi-g-ligutti%202))

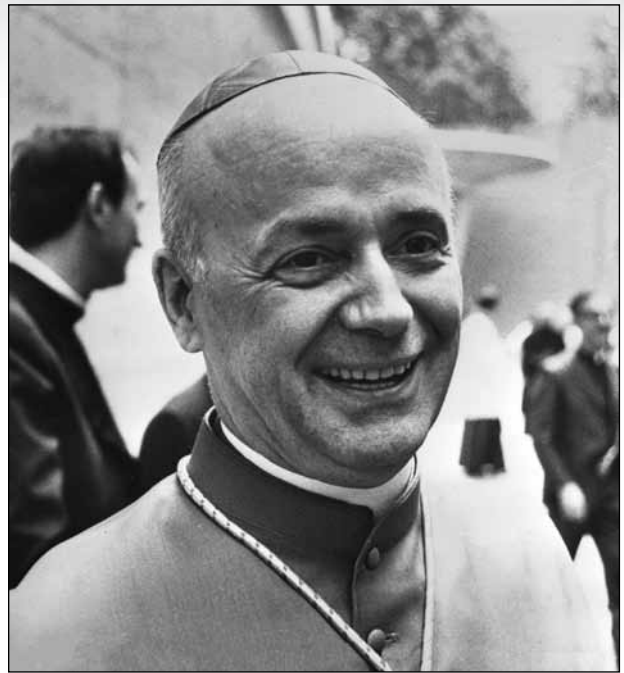
the same dilemma since he had only written a letter and a half per day. For Mojoli, the Malta experience was totally different from his previous posting in Ethiopia. He had described his role there as *"vita missionaria"*. In a letter sent to Archbishop Michael Gonzi, Mojoli noted that *"io non mi sarei mai aspettato una destinazione a Malta! Avevo in animo di stare qui<sup>22</sup> ancora qualche anno per poi ritirarmi a Martinengo a riposare e prepararmi alla chiamata finale"*.<sup>23</sup>

### *Malta in the Nuncio's 'Black Book'*

Nuncio Mojoli had a very poor opinion of Malta. Thus he was very critical in its regard. For him, Malta was a country where *"pettegolezzi"* were the order of the day.<sup>24</sup> By the end of his mission, Mojoli had even declared that in Malta *"non ne potevo più"*<sup>25</sup> and he had also alleged that during his stay, he was suffering from an *"esaurimento nervoso"*. He was irked by the fact that in Malta, it was impossible for one to maintain secrets. Undiplomatically, Archbishop Mojoli described the Maltese as *"noiosi"*.<sup>26</sup> Nuncio Mojoli's disappointment seemed to be due to three main realities: the poor working load, the inadequate living



*Mgr Michael Gonzi*



*Cardinal Giovanni Benelli*

quarters for the papal representation, and the loneliness imposed by his role.

On the issue of loneliness, Archbishop Mojoli remarked to Cardinal Benelli that other diplomats living in Malta had their respective families with them, *"fanno vita sociale con inviti e ricevimenti e si assentano spesso dall'isola"*. On the other hand, a Nuncio was bound to his house to the point that, *"il nunzio, non dovendo interferire nelle cose diocesane interne, a fare ombra ai vescovi con visite e funzioni, non potendo uscire liberamente a causa della sua notorietà e la ristrettezza dell'isola, non potendo fare la vita sociale dei civili, se ne deve stare in casa, alla presa col tempo, e se ne intristisce, anche con pregiudizio alla salute"*.<sup>27</sup> Another shortcoming that Mojoli complained about was the fact that the nunciature lacked a career secretary.<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, Archbishop Mojoli acknowledged the positive features of his position. A Nuncio was the highest grade that a diplomat at the service of the Vatican could aspire for. Other advantages included that Malta had a Catholic ambience, it enjoyed a good climate, and that Italian was frequently used. Still, referring to Malta, Mojoli told Archbishop Ligutti that *"laggiù mi intristisco"*.<sup>29</sup>

*The proposal for a permanent papal residence in Malta*

In a report, Archbishop Mojoli noted that on his being entrusted with the position of Nuncio, Pope Paul VI had informed him that in Malta there was a “piccola casetta” to

be used.<sup>30</sup> He had agreed with the Pope that, at those particular times, Nuncios were not to live in palaces anymore.<sup>31</sup> Still, on taking up his post, Mojoli was not impressed with the accommodation offered. This may partially explain the reasons for Mgr O’Connor preferring to use hotels rather



*A painting by S. Fasolini of Mgr G. Mojoli (1979)*  
(Source: BeWeB - HomeBeWeB – Beni Culturali Ecclesiastici in Web)



*A photo from the younger days of Mgr Mojoli (second from the left) when in 1932 he was on a visit to Lago di Como with a group of parishioners*

than the accommodation intended to be used by the Nuncio.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Mojoli clarified that *“già da Addis Abeba ci fu uno scambio di lettere col segretario locale a Malta a riguardo della ‘residenza’, e il 4 dicembre 1969 ne feci relazione a Mons. Benelli, avanzando riserve e proposte”*.<sup>33</sup>

In January 1970, Cardinal Benelli instructed Nuncio Mojoli to study the issue of a permanent residence and to advance reasonable proposals.<sup>34</sup> Archbishop Mojoli believed that the issue of whether to have a permanent residence or not rested on the adoption of one of the following three conditions:<sup>35</sup>

1. Malta would be under the supervision of an already existing Nuncio in another country;
2. Malta would be under the supervision of a prelate residing in Rome;
3. In Malta, the Vatican would provide for *“una residenza non stabile ma secondo i bisogni e la convenienza”*.

The first model was already practised. Luxembourg was placed with Belgium;

Mauritius with Madagascar; Kuwait with Lebanon; Burundi with Rwanda; and so forth. The second scenario was not totally alien since it had been practised by Mgr O'Connor.

It was Nuncio Mojoli's belief that the way forward in order to have a permanent residence was either to buy a house and adapt it according to the Nuncio's needs or to buy a piece of land on which the residence for the Nuncio would be built. In the latter case, a decent habitation would meanwhile be rented.<sup>36</sup> The Vatican had decided to send Ing. Caiola to study the possibility of building a residence, but Mojoli was convinced that this had better be done after a decision in favour of the project was taken.<sup>37</sup> From the evidence given by Archbishop Mojoli, Ing. Caiola never fulfilled his duties.

On 6 June 1970, Cardinal Benelli, *sostituto* (deputy) to the Vatican Secretary of State, instructed Archbishop Mojoli to consult Archbishop Ligutti about the matter. The Nuncio reported to Cardinal Benelli that Archbishop Ligutti believed that the Balzan

accommodation was *“inutile e un spreco di denaro”*. Archbishop Ligutti preferred the option of a non-residential Nuncio backed by an Italian career secretary with a good knowledge of the English language. The phrase *“escludere in via assoluta un segretario locale”* was added.<sup>38</sup> Archbishop Ligutti also scrapped the idea of *“fabbricare una nunziatura a Malta degna della Santa Sede”*.<sup>39</sup>

What is confusing in this regard is that in the file consulted, there are no letters penned by Archbishop Ligutti that express clearly and unmistakably the above mentioned position. To compound this issue further, six months later, on 12 December 1970, Ligutti wrote to Mojoli that *“circa una eventuale residenza per il Nunzio di Malta, ufficialmente non è di mia competenza e perciò non ho nulla da dire in proposito”*. But he also added that *“lei conosce la mia opinione che rimane invariata”*. Archbishop Mojoli answered that letter on Christmas Eve and thanked Ligutti for his sincerity.<sup>40</sup> Eight months after Archbishop Ligutti was fired by Cardinal Benelli and his participation in the Malta mission was suspended, Ligutti told Mojoli that he believed that in the case of Malta, the financial reform was more important than a permanent residence for the Nuncio.<sup>41</sup> The same claim was repeated by Ligutti in

November 1971.<sup>42</sup> In a report for Benelli’s consumption, Mojoli mentioned Ligutti in a list of persons who supported the idea of *“una residenza salutaria del Nunzio”*.<sup>43</sup> Most probably, Archbishop Ligutti’s priorities differed from those of Nuncio Mojoli.

It emerged from the documentation that Mojoli used two residencies during his stay; a residence in Balzan and another one in Mosta.<sup>44</sup> He was against renewing the residence’s rent at Mosta<sup>45</sup> since *“nel fianco è sorto un edificio, delle balconate, terrazze e piscine”*.<sup>46</sup> Whilst in Balzan the nuns of the Good Shepherd were demanding the residence back. According to Mojoli, they wanted it back at all costs.<sup>47</sup> To make matters worse, no contract which regulated the rental had ever been signed between the concerned stakeholders.<sup>48</sup>

In December 1970, Nuncio Mojoli discussed his future with Archbishop Ligutti. In February 1971, he would have *“compiuto il massimo dello stipendio e del servizio”*. He was ready to continue to give the services of a Nuncio – in Malta – free of charge on the condition that the Nuncio would be *“itinerante”*.<sup>49</sup> Archbishop Mojoli resigned in December 1971, and the vacancy was filled by Archbishop Edoardo Pecoraio.

### Notes and references

- 1 The author would like to thank Mrs Emily Barbaro-Sant, Mr Frans Deguara, Mgr Lawrence Gatt and Mr Hilary Vella for their assistance in writing this study.
- 2 ‘Nota circa la Residenza di Malta,’ a document prepared by Nuncio Giuseppe Mojoli in Series 5, Box 2, Folder 63, Malta Investigation Files, 1968-1973, 1975, Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti Papers, Raynor Memorial Libraries.
- 3 G. Mojoli, *La Chiesa in Etiopia: Nota e Ricordi di un Nunzio* (Rome, 1973).
- 4 ‘Archbishop Giuseppe Mojoli’, *Catholic Hierarchy* (30 Apr 2018), <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bmojoli.html>
- 5 The Apostolic Internunciature of Ethiopia was founded in 1937 as the Apostolic Delegation of Italian East Africa following the Italian colonisation of the mentioned region.
- 6 ‘Pontiff Prays for Newly Independent Nation of Uganda,’ *Catholic Transcript*, LXV, 25 (18 Oct 1962), 8, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CTR19621018-01.2.77&srpos=5&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-Giuseppe+mojoli+----->
- 7 ‘Mons. Ligutti jicčara l-Qagħda Tiegħu’, *Il-Hajja* (21Feb 1970), 1.
- 8 Letter from Apostolic Visitor Luigi Ligutti to Nuncio Giuseppe Mojoli (12 Dec 1970), in Series 5, Box 2, Folder 63, Malta Investigation Files, 1968-1973, 1975, Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti Papers, Raynor Memorial Libraries.
- 9 Letter from Ligutti to Mojoli (1 Apr 1971), *op.cit.*
- 10 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (20 Mar 1971), *op.cit.*

- 11 Letter from Ligutti to Mojoli (25 Nov 1971), *op.cit.*
- 12 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (6 Sep 1971), *op.cit.*
- 13 'Pro-Memoria sulla questione di un Nunzio Apostolico con residenza continuativa a Malta', a document prepared by Nuncio Giuseppe Mojoli in Correspondence with the Apostolic Nunciature to Malta, 1969-1972, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 63, Malta Investigation Files, 1968-1973, 1975, Monsignor Luigi G. Ligutti Papers, Raynor Memorial Libraries.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 'Archbishop O'Connor arrives next Month,' *Times of Malta* (16 Jan 1966), 1.
- 16 'Mgr. O'Connor jasal Malta,' *Il-Berqa* (31 Jan 1966), 1.
- 17 'Nuncio to Malta,' *Catholic Transcript*, Volume LXXII, Number 32 (28 Nov 1969), 15, <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org/?a=d&d=CTR19691128-01.2.104&srpos=2&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-Giuseppe+mojoli+----->
- 18 'Pro-Memoria sulla questione ...', *op.cit.*
- 19 'Archbishop Saverio Zupi', *Catholic Hierarchy* (30 Apr 2018), <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bzupi.html>
- 20 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (24 Dec 1970), *op.cit.*
- 21 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (9 Mar 1971), *op.cit.*
- 22 He was writing from Ethiopia.
- 23 Archbishop's Curia Archives, Floriana, Corrispondenza Gonzi 1971, Vol LXXV.
- 24 'Pro-Memoria sulla questione ...', *op.cit.*
- 25 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (6 Sep 1971), *op.cit.*
- 26 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (29 Mar 1972), *op.cit.*
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (6 Sep 1971), *op.cit.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (6 Sep 1971), *op.cit.*
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 'Pro-Memoria sulla questione ...', *op.cit.*
- 33 'Nota circa la residenza a Malta', *op.cit.*
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 'Pro-Memoria sulla questione ...', *op.cit.*
- 36 'Nota circa la residenza a Malta', *op.cit.*
- 37 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (18 Feb 1971), *op.cit.*
- 38 Letter from Mojoli to Benelli (12 Jun 1970), *op.cit.*
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (24 Mar 1970), *op.cit.*
- 41 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (9 Mar 1970), *op.cit.*
- 42 Letter from Ligutti to Mojoli (25 Nov 1971), *op.cit.*
- 43 'Nota circa la residenza a Malta', *op.cit.*
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 The Mosta residence was in Independence Avenue (Valletta Road). The house was built by Mr Joe Criminale, originally from Msida. Mr Hilary Vella, a retired Head of School and nephew of educator and historian E.B. Vella, was Mojoli's neighbour and used to take care of the Nuncio's Mercedes when Mgr Mojoli was abroad (Mr Hilary Vella / Sergio Grech, 13 Aug 2019).
- 46 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (9 Mar 1971), *op.cit.* This story was confirmed by Mr Hilary Vella and the mentioned residence was owned by Mr Buhagiar ('*tal-Linef*').
- 47 Letter from Mojoli to Ligutti (9 Dec 1970), *op.cit.*
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Letter from Ligutti to Mojoli (9 Dec 1970), *op.cit.*

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