## The History of the Twentieth Century Episode 50 "The Prison of Nations" Transcript

## [music: fanfare]

In the early twentieth century, Austria-Hungary was a large empire that included not only German-speaking Austrians and the nation of Hungary, but also virtually all of the Czech, Slovak, Croat, and Slovene peoples, as well as significant numbers of Ukranians, Poles, Romanians, Serbs, and Italians, most of whom would have preferred to have been citizens of other countries, or of their own countries.

With all this restless discontent and jumble of peoples held together in an awkward and unsettled empire, Austria-Hungary came to be called by some as "The Prison of Nations."

Welcome to The History of the Twentieth Century.

[opening music]

Episode 50. The Prison of Nations.

In last week's episode, we took a look at the creation and rise of the Austrian Empire. This week, I'd like to start by looking around the Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. As you know, the Compromise of 1867 has given Hungary a sort of semi-independence, so we'll start there.

If you look at a map of Hungary at this time, you will notice at once that it is much larger than Hungary as we know it today. This Hungary is, in fact, slightly more than half the total land area of the Dual Monarchy, so, yeah, Hungary is bigger than Austria. In land area, that is. Not in population. We have a little nomenclature problem here, because if we call this piece of the Dual Monarchy "Hungary," it would be tempting to call the other piece "Austria." But that isn't technically correct, because Austria is a pretty specific region in the Danube valley up in the Alps. Some folks at the time spoke of Transleithania and Cisleithania. Remember how the Leitha River is the traditional boundary between Austria and Hungary? And by the way, I've been pronouncing it "lay-ta," and that's not right; it should be "Leitha" River. But either way, it is the traditional boundary between Austria and Hungary. So if you look at it from Vienna's point of view, Transleithania would be the region on the far side of the Leitha, that is, Hungary, while Cisleithania would be like to use the terms Transleithania and Cisleithania over and

over during this podcast, I decided, screw it, I'm just going to say Austria and Hungary. But keep in mind that my terminology here is not quite proper. Especially with Austria.

Anyway, Hungary. As I mentioned last time, old Hungary includes the region of Transylvania, which today is part of Romania, and also includes what we today know as the independent state of Slovakia and a good portion, although not all, of what we know today as Croatia. While Hungary is slightly more than half the total land area of the Dual Monarchy, it's more sparsely populated, so it represents only about 40% of the total population. Which is still a lot. Especially when you consider that, under the terms of the Compromise of 1867 that produced the Dual Monarchy, Hungary is only responsible for contributing 30% of the national government's budget. So Hungary is 50% of the land, 40% of the people, and only pays 30% of the taxes? Sweet! If you're Hungarian.

Ethnic Hungarians, or Magyars, are a people who are relatively late arrivals to Europe, having migrated in only about the ninth century or so. They speak a unique language and represent a unique culture, unrelated to their European neighbors, and this has given the Magyars a particular wariness toward the neighboring cultures, especially Slavs and Germans, and a zealous conviction to defend Magyar ways. Compared to the Austrian part of the Empire, the Hungarians were much more strict about insisting on the use of the Hungarian language in their kingdom, and the teaching of Hungarian in schools, even to non-Hungarian schoolchildren, which, as you might guess, would become a touchy subject.

Magyars represent only slightly more than half the population of old Hungary, according to the official censuses of the time. Some people believed then, and some still believe today, that the Hungarian government fudged its census figures to show a Magyar majority, and that in fact ethnic Hungarians represent less than 50% of the population of their own country. There were German and Jewish communities in Hungary. There were virtually all of the Slovaks, and there were a lot of Croats. But the Hungarian government was particularly sensitive about Transylvania. Three million Romanians lived there, as against seven million in Romania proper. Look at that from the Romanian point of view for a minute. To the Romanian government, a third of the people who ought to be its citizens are living in Hungary and their children are being forced to learn Hungarian in school. You can imagine why they might not be too happy about that.

You might also be wondering by this point why Hungary doesn't just give Transylvania to Romania and be done with it. Well, the answer is that although Romanians are actually a majority in Transylvania, there is a substantial Magyar minority and, of course, the Hungarian government doesn't like the idea of seeing those people living in Romania, or their children being forced to learn Romanian in school.

Transylvania is a good example of the problem facing the Empire as a whole. It's not just that the Empire encompasses many different ethnic groups. It's also that, even the individual regions

of Austria-Hungary, like Transylvania, have significant ethnic minorities in them. If you can't even decide whether one province like Transylvania should be "Romanian" or "Hungarian," then what exactly is the identity of your whole Empire?

With that in mind, let's turn our attention to Cisleithania, or, because we're all friends here, Austria. Austria has a much more laid-back attitude toward languages than Hungary does. Austria will allow its local diets, or parliaments, of the individual regions to choose their own language to be the official local language to use in schools and in government. So, for instance, in Dalmatia, Croatian and Italian were both recognized as local languages. But Galicia, which was Austria's share of the spoils from the partition of Poland, chose Polish as its language. Well, that sounds fair enough. But not when you consider that Galicia also has a significant Ukrainian minority. What about them? There were German speakers everywhere in Cisleithania, especially in the upper class. Aristocrats, bureaucrats, traders, merchants and businesspeople, military officers. They were there to rule, and they regarded German as not only the obvious choice for an official language but also a language uniquely rich in culture and tradition. German speakers didn't regard Slav languages as equal. There was a famous incident in the diet of Carniola, what we would today call Slovenia, where after elections to the local diet, there were enough newly elected ethnic Slovenes to start a movement in the legislature to have the Slovene language replace German as the official local language. An outraged German-speaking member of the diet gave a speech before the assembly with about a dozen books in his arms. These, he said, were the sum total of all literature written in the Slovene language, and demanded to know how anyone could believe that a student could be given a university-level education in a language with such a paltry literature to study from.

But the most serious language conflict was in the Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia. These regions were the homeland of the Czech people, but had also been part of the Holy Roman Empire, one of the few non-German speaking regions inside the Holy Roman Empire, but centuries in the Empire meant a large migration of German speakers to these provinces, and by the early twentieth century, Germans were an influential minority. When Czech was made the official language in 1897, it led to a political crisis because the German minority found being forced to speak Czech outrageous and unacceptable, and their cause was taken up by German speakers throughout the empire. Franz Josef was forced to restore German as the official language in 1899, which in turn outraged the Czechs.

By the way, those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century already know that the conflict between ethnic Czechs and ethnic Germans in Bohemia and Moravia is going to last for decades longer than Austria-Hungary itself. And if you don't know why that's important, try googling "Sudetenland."

[music: Hungarian Dance No. 5]

So the Prison of Nations was a large holding cell in which a dozen different ethnic groups quarreled with each other and with the jailer. We should not be surprised that the author of *Civilization and Its Discontents* lived most of his life in Vienna.

I am referring here of course to Sigmund Freud, who, at the beginning of the twentieth century, may be the most important single historical figure living in Vienna. *Civilization and its Discontents* was not written until 1929, eleven years after the end of Austria-Hungary, but you can hardly help but draw the connection. In that book, Freud argues that it is human nature to act freely to satisfy one's desires, which, since this is Freud, have a lot to do with violence and sexual gratification. Civilization, Freud argues, requires that individuals repress these impulses for the good of society. It is inherent in the very concept of civilization that this will lead to feelings of discontent and frustration in the individual. This means, ironically, that human beings build civilizations in order to improve their lives, but the existence of that civilization increases the level of unhappiness. So, yeah, he might have been thinking of the Dual Monarchy.

Sigmund Freud was born to a Jewish family of Galician origin living in Moravia in 1856. So this is a background that is very Austro-Hungarian Empire. He came to Vienna to study medicine and got his MD in 1881. In 1885, he went to Paris, where he studied under a French neurologist, Jean-Martin Charcot, who was researching the use of hypnosis in treating mental disorders.

Freud began a private practice in Vienna in 1886, in which he specialized in treating nervous disorders, by which I mean things like anxiety, obsession, and depression. Freud tried hypnosis at first, relying on it mostly to get his patients to relax and speak freely, which one of his patients dubbed "the talking cure." Freud soon abandoned hypnosis in favor of "free association," which means encouraging the patient to speak freely about whatever comes to mind, without guidance or interruption, and without self-censoring any thought as either indiscreet, or unimportant, or nonsensical.

Freud's model of the human mind held that his patients' adult problems, anxiety, depression, and the like, were the symptoms of unresolved childhood developmental traumas, usually revolving around violence, sexuality, and relationships with parents. He further held that the patients repressed these unresolved traumas and erected mental barriers against dealing with them. His treatment method, which he called psychoanalysis, involved encouraging the patient to free associate while the therapist listened, looking for clues to the nature of the repressed trauma. Once the repressed trauma was identified and resolved, Freud held, the symptoms would disappear.

He developed a therapy method by which the patients would lie on a couch, with the therapist sitting behind them, out of sight, just a disembodied voice. This was a way of encouraging free association. Freud's ideas about the human mind would dominate the field of psychotherapy for most of the twentieth century, while in the popular culture, the image of therapy would inevitably be of a patient on a couch, with the therapist nearby, scribbling notes on a little pad.

In the year 1900, Freud published *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in which he used case studies to document his view that dreams were the product of the unconscious mind, and that the contents of the patient's dreams were symbols that, if properly interpreted, could be used as part of the psychoanalytic process to identify the repressed trauma.

Freud is sometimes identified, along with Karl Marx and Albert Einstein, as one of the most influential thinkers in the twentieth century. Freud's ideas took hold quickly and revolutionized thinking about the human mind. Other psychotherapists quickly embraced Freud's ideas, although Freud was intolerant of deviation, and so we speak of some early followers who "broke" with Freud. One such was Alfred Adler, another Viennese physician who initially accepted Freud's psychoanalysis, but soon decided that Freud was wrong to stress issues in childhood sexual development as the major cause of mental and emotional disorders. Adler thought that feelings of inferiority were more often the problem, and coined the phrase "inferiority complex." In Adlerian therapy, the therapist and the patient sit together, facing each other in matching chairs to emphasize equality. He was an early advocate for a more sensitive style of child rearing, in which parents, teachers, and other adults encourage children to reason out solutions to problems in a constructive, cooperative and democratic way.

And then there was the Swiss psychiatrist Karl Jung, who took the view that it was not childhood sexual development, but what Jung called the collective unconscious, an inventory of thoughts and ideas that we all inherit from our ancestors. Jung also gave us the concepts of introversion and extraversion.

By the way, Freud's concept of free association gave a kick start to the literary device we now call stream of consciousness, which is really just an attempt to capture the feel of free association in the written word. It would become big in the twentieth century, and would appear everywhere from Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Times Past* to James Joyce's *Ulysses* to *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. Talk about free association.

Freud's fame made him the go-to therapist, and he rubbed elbows with the most important and influential people in Vienna. He even consulted with the composer Gustav Mahler, whom I am terribly remiss in not having mentioned sooner. So let me fix that now. Last week, I talked about the glory days of Mozart and Haydn, and Antonio Salieri, during the reign of the Emperor Joseph II. The list of great Viennese composers certainly doesn't end there. Throughout the nineteenth century, Vienna maintained its position as the musical capital of Europe.

The list of famous composers who made Vienna their home in the nineteenth century is so long, my God, I could spend several podcast episodes on this, just talking about Viennese composers: Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann, the Strauss family, three Johanns, a Joseph, and an Eduard (for clarity's sake let me point out that these Strausses are all related to each other, but are no relation to Germany's Richard Strauss). And let us not forget Anton Bruckner, and Johannes Brahms.

I already mentioned Richard Strauss as the greatest German composer at the beginning of the century, and Claude Debussy, the greatest French composer at the beginning of the century. Well, Gustav Mahler is perhaps the greatest Austrian composer, after the death of Brahms in 1897, and arguably the greatest composer of the age. He was born to a German-speaking Jewish family of modest means in Bohemia in 1860. As a member of a minority group within a minority group, as it were, Mahler said he always felt like an outsider. He showed a gift for music at an early age, which his family encouraged, and at 15, was accepted to the Vienna Conservatory.

He worked as a conductor, beginning his career at the age of 20, and worked his way up through a series of conducting positions in small town theatres while also composing music. He was known primarily as a music director and conductor during this time, though his compositions also earned him some money and acclaim. As a music director, he had a reputation with the musicians as harsh and heavy-handed, prone to angry outbursts, while the public saw him as a colorful conductor who used flamboyant gestures. In other words, your typical orchestra conductor.

He worked his way up to the position of director of the Royal Hungarian Opera in Budapest in 1888. When Mahler staged German works such as Wagner's Ring cycle, he ran afoul of Hungary's increasing right-wing nationalism. He resigned in 1891 to take a position at the Hamburg Stadttheater.

Mahler's career goal was to become director of the Vienna Hofoper, the Imperial Court Opera. In 1897, he converted to Catholicism, quite possibly because his Jewish background was an impediment to his achieving that position. If that was the idea, it worked, because Franz Josef did indeed appoint Mahler to the job just a few months later.

Vienna was home to many prominent Jewish people, including Freud, Adler, and Mahler, whom we've already met, and also remember Theodor Herzl, the Viennese journalist and founder of the Zionist movement. The Jewish urban professionals and merchants of the Austrian Empire were among its staunchest supporters, which makes sense if you think about it, since the nationalist dream of breaking the Empire apart into ethnic states would seem to leave no room for Jewish people. But anti-Semitism was a thing, even in Vienna, and that same year, Christian Social Party candidate Karl Lueger was elected mayor of Vienna on an anti-Semitic platform. Lueger governed Vienna well enough and there was no actual persecution of Jews under his administration, but he did use anti-Semitic rhetoric enthusiastically to gain supporters and votes. It was perhaps because of Lueger that a saying emerged in Vienna at this time that anti-Semitism was the socialism of fools.

But the anti-Semitic climate made life uncomfortable for Mahler, despite his conversion to Catholicism. Lueger was once quoted as saying "I myself decide who is a Jew and who isn't," a view often taken by anti-Semites.

Mahler felt under pressure to prove his German-ness, so to speak, and staged Vienna's first performance of Wagner's Ring cycle, to much acclaim. The anti-Semites, of course, weren't convinced. When Mahler staged the opera *Dalibor* by the Czech nationalist composer Bedřich Smetana, he offended nationalistic-minded Germans.

In 1901, the 41-year old Mahler met a 22-year old Viennese socialite named Alma Maria Schindler. Her father and stepfather were artists, and Alma would spend her life in the company of men of the arts. She had already had affairs with the artist Gustav Klimt and the composer Alexander von Zemlinsky when she met Mahler. They married three months later, to the approval of no one. Mahler's relatives questioned whether the uninhibited Alma was capable of settling down and being a faithful wife. And they were right about that, as it turned out. The Catholic elites of Vienna were offended that a nice Catholic girl—or even a not-so-nice Catholic girl like, you know Alma Maria Schindler—would marry a Jewish man. Cause conversions still don't count.

Alma was interested in composing music herself, but Gustav wouldn't hear of it. There was only room for one composer in the family, he told her, and insisted that she give up music. Alma reluctantly agreed.

The anti-Semitic campaigns took their toll, and Mahler left the Court Opera in 1907 to take a position as director of the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. Two years later, he would become director of the New York Philharmonic.

Alma had, meanwhile, suffered from depression for years, and in 1909, Mahler discovered that she was having an affair with a 26-year old architect named Walter Gropius, who would go on to found the Bauhaus school of architecture and become one of the most influential of modern architects. (Yeah, remind me to do a podcast on the Bauhaus School when we get past the Great War.) Anyway, Mahler was devastated. He consulted with Sigmund Freud on the causes of his wife's depression, and Freud reportedly told him, "*Dummkopf, lassen Sie die Frau schon die Musik komponieren*!" ("Let your wife compose music already, you moron!") I may be paraphrasing there.

But Mahler took Freud's advice and a much happier Alma began to write music of her own. Gustav discovered, to his surprise and delight, that her music was pretty good, and he became an enthusiastic supporter. I know, right? Sadly, it was not to last. Mahler was already weakening from complications of a heart defect, and he would pass away in 1911.

I said Mahler was noted primarily as a conductor and music director during his lifetime. His compositions attracted less attention, partly because his output was modest, and partly because of anti-Semitism. Karl Lueger was not the first anti-Semite, but he was perhaps the first politician to make use of anti-Semitism to garner votes. He will not be the last. Consequently, it won't be until the second half of the twentieth century before Mahler's reputation as a composer fully develops.

And speaking of anti-Semitism and Vienna and artists, I suppose I should pause here for a moment to acknowledge the arrival in Vienna in 1905, at the same time the climate of anti-Semitism was driving Mahler out of the Court Opera, of a sixteen-year old orphan and aspiring young artist named Adolf Hitler.

Adolf Hitler lived at the Männerheim, the "Home for Men," a subsidized hostel operated by the Vienna municipal government, and occupied by a mix of day laborers, aspiring artists, rustics from the rural parts of the Empire, and drunks. Hitler applied twice to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and twice was rejected. He painted watercolors of Viennese landmarks, and though no gallery took an interest in his work, he could sell a few on street corners and get some work tinting postcards, as a way to make pocket money.

None of his neighbors at the Männerheim knew it, but Hitler was receiving small inheritance payments that would have made it possible for him to live in much more comfortable lodgings, but he seems to have preferred to live there, among the down and out. When you're young, I suppose, it's exciting and romantic to live hand to mouth. He was very well-liked at the Männerheim, probably because he had a reputation as the go-to guy for residents who fell behind on their government-subsidized rent payments. Hitler knew how to prowl the building and shake down the other residents for contributions to help a neighbor out. Unlike most of the other residents, Hitler had no known vices. He did not drink or smoke or visit prostitutes; his only indulgences were chocolate pastries and an occasional ticket to the Court Opera when they were doing Wagner.

He did have a couple of quirks. There was a chair in the common room at the Männerheim that Hitler insisted on having to himself, because it had the best light, which he needed when he was tinting postcards. The other residents tolerated this good-naturedly, referring to it as "the Hitler chair" and reminding each other not to sit there. And he could get all wound up about politics, haranguing whoever would listen about the decline of morality, and how the Slavs were out to destroy the Empire, and the treacheries of Jews and the Freemasons. The other residents learned not to talk politics around Hitler, but again, they put up with these quirks, since he was such a nice guy, otherwise.

## [music: Carnival Overture]

A few minutes ago, I identified Gustav Mahler as the greatest Austrian composer of the age, but there are people who might want to give me an argument on that, especially Czech people. Come to think of it, a fair number of Americans might want to give me an argument on that, too. Because another contender for the title is Antonín Dvořák, an ethnic Czech composer born in Bohemia, near Prague, in 1841. Like Mahler, he showed an aptitude for music at an early age. Unlike Mahler, he was educated in music locally, studying violin, viola, and organ, and, of course, composition. Dvořák struggled for many years in poorly paid positions. In 1874, at the age of 33, the recently married and still struggling composer applied for an Austrian state prize for music composition, submitting a portfolio of fifteen works, including two symphonies. One of the members of the jury was Johannes Brahms, who was described as "overcome" by Dvořák's music. Dvořák won the prize, and Brahms would be an ardent booster and fan of Dvořák's music for the remainder of his life.

Inspired by Smetana before him, Dvořák strove to articulate a Czech national music, incorporating elements of Slavic music generally and Czech music in particular. Needless to say, this was well received in Prague, but in the larger Empire, Dvořák's Slavic inspiration worked against him. For example, in 1880 the Vienna Philharmonic commissioned Dvořák to write his Sixth Symphony, but the musicians in Vienna refused to perform it, on the grounds that they had performed a Dvořák piece last season, and two pieces of Czech music in just two years was going too far. The symphony premiered in Prague instead.

But by this time, Dvořák's music had made it to Britain, where there was little prejudice against Czechs, and the British public quickly embraced his music. Dvořák would visit London several times in the 1880s to conduct concerts of his own music there, to high acclaim.

Success in London also attracted attention in the United States, where he also became popular. Now, I know I'm getting pretty far afield from the issues facing Austria-Hungary by this point, but I'm an American and Dvořák is important in the history of American music, so I hope my other listeners will indulge me for a couple minutes of digression.

In 1892 in New York City, there was a wealthy music patron named Jeanette Thurber. Her husband had made a fortune in the grocery business, and Mrs. Thurber embarked on an ambitious effort to found a music conservatory, called the National Conservatory of Music, for the purpose of establishing a distinctly American style of music.

The United States was a cultural backwater at this time, and if you were a serious American musician, you went to Europe for your training. Jeanette Thurber set out to change this. The National Conservatory for Music would promote music education, would provide financial assistance for talented but needy students, and would be open to women and African-American students, which was quite progressive for the day.

Best of all, Jeanette Thurber bagged none other than Antonín Dvořák to be the director for the then-exorbitant salary of \$15,000 a year. Dvořák would live in New York City for three years, with one summer spent in Iowa, and he would take up the question of how to create a uniquely American music. Dvořák would advocate for Americans to embrace African-American and Native American musical styles in the same way that he himself had embraced Slavic music.

And he would do more than advocate. While in the US, Dvořák would be commissioned to compose a symphony for the New York Philharmonic. This would come to be known as his

Ninth Symphony, which the composer subtitled "From the New World," and in which he would put into practice his ideas about American music.

The symphony was received with wild acclaim upon its premiere in Carnegie Hall, and it remains by far Dvořák's most popular work and one of the most popular symphonies in the entire repertoire. Dvořák's Slavic influences are apparent in it, but it also captures the wide-open American plains in its broad lyrical passages, and America's industry in its loud freneticism.

[music: Dvořák Symphony No. 9 "From the New World"]

Dvořák would grow homesick and return to Europe, eventually passing away in 1904, and the Conservatory's finances would suffer in the economic downturn of the 1890s, but the influence of both would be felt in American music throughout the twentieth century.

And by the way, I already mentioned how Gustav Mahler directed the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic a few years later. We are seeing here the early signs of the rise of America not just as an economic and a military power, but now as a cultural influence, and the rise of New York City as a center for the arts to rival the capitals of Europe.

We'll have to stop there for today. Okay, well, I went ahead and filled up the whole rest of the episode with my American tangent, didn't I? Sorry about that, and I'm sorry, too, but I'm going to have to ask for a week off to work on research and writing, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time at *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we carry on with the tale of Austria-Hungary into the twentieth century, and in particular, examine the international crisis she provoked in 1908 that triggered the long, slow slide to the disastrous war to come. That's in two weeks' time, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Alma Mahler was only 31 years old when Gustav died. She had an affair with the artist Oskar Kokoschka, and later rekindled the relationship with Walter Gropius, marrying him in 1915. While Gropius was serving in the army, Alma began an affair with the novelist Franz Werfel. Gropius found out about this after Alma gave birth to a child by Werfel, and divorced her in 1920. Afterward, she moved in with Werfel, although she didn't get around to marrying him until 1929. She called herself Alma Mahler-Werfel after that.

Werfel was Jewish, so after the *anschluss* with Germany in 1938, the couple fled to France. When the Germans occupied France in 1940, the couple hid out at Lourdes for a while, and eventually fled to the United States. The Jewish Werfel was inspired by the story of St. Bernadette of Lourdes while he was there, and in 1941 wrote a novel, *Das Lied von Bernadette*, which was translated into English as *The Song of Bernadette*. It was number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list for 13 weeks in 1942, and was made into a film in 1943.

Franz Werfel died in 1945. Alma became a US citizen in 1946 and lived out the rest of her life in New York City. She died in 1964, at the age of 85.

At that time, there was a weekly American television program called *That Was the Week that Was*, copied from a British program with the same name. It satirized the weekly news and other topical subjects. You can think of it as an early prototype of *Saturday Night Live*. The songwriter-satirist Tom Lehrer, who contributed songs to the program, saw Alma Mahler-Werfel's obituary in the *New York Times*. He would later describe it as the raciest obituary it had ever been his pleasure to read. It inspired him to compose a song, entitled "Alma."

"Alma" was performed on *That Was the Week that Was* just a few weeks after her death. The song is written in Lehrer's characteristic style of quirky rhymes and smirky irreverence. A sample lyric goes: "While married to Gus she met Gropius/And soon she was swinging with Walter/Gus died and her teardrops were copious/She cried all the way to the altar."

If you are familiar with work of Tom Lehrer, you are probably singing along with me right now. If you aren't, it's available for download at the usual places. I would play it here, but it's copyrighted, so, how about some Mahler instead?

[music: Mahler Symphony No. 5]

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