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## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

### **The Heart To Rule: Election Documents in Yucatec Maya of 1612, 1706 and 1812**

**Matthew Restall**

The analysis of a few isolated notarial documents such as these is in some sense a spurious exercise. The historian pretends to glean data from these folios alone, when in reality he is relying on a body of primary and secondary material that, were it properly referenced and introduced as evidence for otherwise suppositious statements, would enlarge the work from Notes and Documents to book scale.

This may be less of a concern in the case of Maya-language notarial manuscripts from colonial Yucatán. Unlike Nahuatl-language sources, which have been extensively published and analyzed, allowing for the emergence of clearly-defined historical patterns for Central Mexico, Yucatán's indigenous language material has yet to be comprehensively studied. Roys (1939 et al.) transcribed and translated an impressive quantity of Maya manuscripts, but his analysis remained nascent; Thompson (1978) has shown how significant a window onto Maya society documents from one town and one century alone can be, but his achievement, still just in dissertation form, reveals how much is left to do; Hunt (1974), Clendinnen (1987) and especially Farriss (1984) have gone a long way to creating a coherent picture of the Maya, but none have published work based on sources written by the indigenous people in their own language.

The following comments, impossible without the knowledge of these works of scholarship, have also been influenced by preliminary explorations through a jungle of several hundred other Maya notarial documents, a thorough study of which may confirm some of the theories below, and will no doubt reveal the hopeless naivety of some others.

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**Elections.** It is in the sheer uneventfulness of the record of the Ticul election, presumably taking place in December of 1611, that its significance lies. It is so often the case that the everyday notarial records of *cabildo* and personal legal business are lost. Perhaps never having made it out of the *cah*, or community, where they were drawn up, such documents fail to be protected by archival obscurity from the ravages of time. Disputes over land or, in this case, political office, are generators of paperwork, and thus have a better chance of surviving, although not always case-intact. Petitions too will often make it to the provincial (even vice-regal) capital, as they must if they are to be successful. But these record exceptional circumstances. Only by extrapolation, by hypothesizing the assumptions made by the parties at the time, can we determine what normal practice was, and discover what was to them too obvious to be written down.

So what is important about the simple list of officers made in 1612? Is not the list of the 1706 manuscript more comprehensive? Yes, but it does not prove whether an annual list of officers was or was not made in Tekanto. The original 1612 record only implies this was the case in Ticul, but does not state it.

Fortuitously, the 1612 entry was copied down in 1801 as part of the compilation of evidence in the lawsuit over the Sabacche land tract. This dispute, between a Spanish settler and a local Maya family named Tzakum, lasted from 1791 to 1820, when the European finally won. The case generated 188 folios in Spanish and 19 in Maya. Why the 1612 election record was copied down is not clear, but the copier, a notary named Juan Ventura Dzul, states that he was faithfully copying from the town election book. I know of no such book surviving for any Yucatec town, although no doubt some have. However, Tekanto did have a testament book, which was a town record of all wills, inspected periodically by a visiting Spanish church official. Thus Tekanto, as well as Ticul, may have kept an election book. It may in fact have been common practice wherever records were kept in colonial Yucatán.

The accuracy of the word election to describe the process of political accession or appointment among the colonial Maya is dubious. I use the word because the Maya themselves use it, in loan-word form (*u libroil elecon*, the election book, 1612; *u thanil eleccion*, the election statement, 1707), presumably because that was the term used by the Spanish authorities. Indeed, in the Spanish translation

of the 1812 petition, the word election is used. However, the Maya version does not at that point use election, but instead uses a Maya term (*ālic*). I take *ā* to be *aa*, and therefore the verb *aal*, or *al*, to say or command. The Pio Perez dictionary records the single and double *a* versions with the same meaning, but there seems to be more nuance than that. It is true that colonial notaries seemed to use single or double vowels according to their own rules or mood, yet I suspect that there were regional and temporal variations that scholars in this country have yet to fathom. Still, I cannot recall seeing the verb *al* as *aal* when it meant unequivocally say or order. Furthermore, the verb also appears in the 1612 document below, with a double *a* (*beluaalob*), and in the same context as its use of 1812, namely that of the appointment of political officers (*bel* means office, tenure, occupation).

I have therefore translated the word in these two instances as appointment, bearing in mind the semantic relationship of the usage to what we would call command or order. This is significant, as the official process was, from the Spanish end at least, appointment by command. It may have been an election from the Maya end in the strict sense of the word, a choosing, but not in the democratic sense implied in modern usage. Whether the Maya use of the term *aal* pre-dates the Conquest or not is uncertain. Broadly speaking, the indigenous method of election involved a gathering of the principal men of the community at which a decision would be made and appointments confirmed and ritualized. This tradition was pre-Hispanic in Central and Southern Mexico, and was possibly pan-Mesoamerican. Within that basic pattern there were sub-systems of rotation based on calendrical cycles and the subunits of geopolitical jurisdiction, overlaid with the manoeuvring and factionalism fundamental to human political systems.

The details of this in Yucatán have yet to be explored beyond the preliminary findings of Thompson (1978). In terms of the documents below, we may suppose that the 1612 entry records a year in which officers were chosen by the Maya and successfully submitted for approval to the Spanish authorities. Any systematic rotation or wheeling-and-dealing remains hidden. The 1812 petition refers to an election that has taken place, presumably two months earlier, in December 1811, and also includes the presentation of three replacement candidates for the governorship of the town. The manner of presentation indicates one way in which the Maya worked the

system to their advantage, for the dice are clearly loaded in favor of Rafael Tzin. The underlining of his name was presumably made when, several months later, Tzin is confirmed as the replacement *batab*, as discussed below. Royal gubernatorial ratification of candidates chosen by the Maya would have been pro forma; Spanish officials knew little of local Maya affairs and were motivated to complicate neither local politics nor their own jobs. Thus the Maya petitioners get their way, and the Spanish authorities can continue to enjoy the three-century-old delusion that they understand and control indigenous politics.

The petition of 1812 indicates remarkable continuity in a number of ways, not least of which is the implication that the Maya are still choosing officials for their own *cabildo*, and submitting them to the Spanish authorities for ratification, and still engaging in a factional politics that periodically disturbs the surface of the system. Spanish records show that Maya claims of senility among their *batabs* were rampant in the early generations after the Conquest. There is no doubt that the Maya immediately learned how to work within and exploit the Spanish legal system to their advantage. It seems that in 1812 they may have still been employing the same tactics. If so, the allegedly-senile *batab* of Xcupilcacab had insufficient power to muster a petition of protest. The Rafael Tzin faction certainly seems to have won the support of all the town's *alcaldes* and *regidores*.

The Spanish documentation that has survived with the petition dates from between January 27 and April 20, 1812. The earliest refers to a previous petition by Xcupilcacab requesting the removal of the *batab*, Don Manuel Na, on the grounds of age and also his alleged treatment of all the inhabitants as though they were his personal vassals. This latter accusation no doubt gets closer to the truth, introducing as it does an internecine element, but perhaps for this very reason it does not make it to the petition of February 15th. The earlier petition also apparently mentions the same three replacement candidates and also in a way that favors Rafael Tzin, who by April 17 is approved in office. The Xcupilcacab Maya achieved their end via the Spanish legal system with unusual speed.

**Political Title and Office.** The examples below illustrate the dual usage of Maya and Spanish titles of office. This phenomenon lasted throughout the colonial period, as a hangover from the phase of transition immediately after the Conquest when the Spanish political frame was being im-

posed on the indigenous one. Only in this initial phase did the existence of two titles systems indicate two systems of office. By the time of all the documents below, one system was in operation, albeit one that was perceived differently by Maya and Spaniard. Thus the royal governor of the province is called such in the 1706 document, but in 1812 he is referred to as *halach uinic*, the pre-Conquest title for the highest political officer in the land.

In the sixteenth century the Maya community head, the *batab*, exists uneasily alongside the Spanish cognate, the *gobernador*. The two offices merge by the time of our first example below, 1612, and the term *batab* becomes standard--although note that in 1706 the abbreviation *gor* is used.

The 1706 document is unusual in a number of ways. First, it records an unusual event: The appointment of a Spaniard to the post of *batab*. Of the three hundred odd notarial documents from colonial Tekanto that I have seen, this is the only instance I noticed where the governor or *batab* had a Spanish surname. This Don Agustin de Palensuela is called *almehen*, the Maya term for noble not usually used to denote Spaniards, and also *capitan*, a Spanish title used later by mestizo *batabs*. This points to him being a mestizo, although he is also called *señor*, never a Maya title, so he was probably considered a Spaniard by the Spanish and Maya authorities, albeit a local Spaniard.

When I discussed this document with Thompson, he hypothesized that the Spanish authorities had imposed Don Agustin on Tekanto as a result of a factional dispute among the Maya principales that had prevented them from choosing and presenting a single candidate. This makes a lot of sense. In order for a colonial minority to govern the province against overwhelming demographic odds, it was essential to maintain some sort of *pax hispania*. There are also recorded cases from the first six decades after the Conquest of the Spanish authorities imposing governors on Maya communities in order to forcibly resolve local succession disputes. This often produced Maya protests against parvenus, as the Spanish, despite their acceptance in principle of a Maya aristocracy, used their position as power-broker to undermine the authority of local dynasties that were perceived as potentially threatening to colonial hegemony. This involved not only appointing noble Maya to posts outside their traditional territory of communities, but also elevating Maya who were considered socially inadequate by their fellow townsmen.

It is interesting to note that, as late as 1706, a

Spaniard is being imposed as governor on a Maya community. Palensuela may have served for a year, or until the dispute was resolved. He had been replaced by 1724, to be sure, and records from then on are sufficiently extant to be certain that this did not happen again in this town.

The 1706 record also demonstrates how the entire body of principal men continued to participate in community politics, as they had done before the Conquest. Whereas most documents also list the primary offices--*batab*, *alcaldes*, *regidores* and the *escribano* or notary--we see here a plethora of Spanish titles being employed as a mechanism of inclusion. This is an area that needs to be studied further: how prestigious, for example, were all these titles, and did they relate to specific duties? The answers are clear in regards to the notary, and the *maestro*, who was the senior official in the local Maya ecclesiastical hierarchy. Why a sum of six pesos is listed after the maestro's name is not clear. Perhaps he received a stipend, although the offices of *alcalde* and *regidor* often *costed* their recipients. The *tupil doctrina* (*tupil* being a Nahuatl-based word introduced by the Spanish) was junior to the *maestro*, just as the *alcalde meson* and *alguaciles* in the 1706 list were on a tier junior to the *mayordomo*, *regidores* and *alcaldes* (Farriss: 231-7; Roys, 1940: 39-40; Thompson: 257-366).

The standard numbers for the primary offices are illustrated in these three documents, as are some of the variations and complexities of political tenure among the colonial Maya. The norm was four *regidores*, as we see here every time this office is listed (1612, 1801, 1706 and for 1707, 1812), and two *alcaldes* (1612, 1706 and for 1707, 1812). The significance of these numbers is clearly related to the quadripartite division of Maya towns that existed before the Conquest and survives to this day. However, one link in the chain has yet to be proven. We know that the Maya considered the *regidores* to be the equivalent of the pre-Hispanic *ahcuchcab*--the two titles appear beside each other in sixteenth-century records, and then as one in the seventeenth. The pre-Hispanic *ahcuchcab* were each responsible for a sub-unit or jurisdiction of the *cah*. Were the colonial *ahcuchcab*, the *regidores*, also organized along geopolitical lines? That is the missing link.

There was no clear antecedent to the office of *alcalde*, but because the Spaniards ranked *alcaldes* as senior to *regidores*, Maya *alcaldes* seem to have inherited the status of *cah*-wide executive or judicial officers immediately beneath the

batab. Indeed, for 1801 in Ticul there is only one *alcalde*, but, as becomes common by the turn of the nineteenth century, a lieutenant is also listed. It may be that, to maintain the same numbers, the office of lieutenant in some towns replaced that of senior *alcalde*, which is the office immediately below *batab* anyway. Note, however, that in Xcupilcacab in 1812, there are two *alcaldes* and a lieutenant.

**Language.** The study of language as a barometer of acculturation has been exploited in scientific detail by Kartunnen and Lockhart (1976) and Lockhart (forthcoming) for Nahuatl, and Kartunnen has published a comparative study of Nahuatl and Yucatec Maya and the impact upon them of Spanish (1985). The Maya part of this latter work is based on a few texts, and the conclusions are preliminary, leaving much to be done in this area. Still, it requires little philological expertise to see that in the examples below, first, the impact of Spanish is minimal in terms of vocabulary, and second, there is little change between the earlier and later examples.

Although the 1612 example is barely one line, the impression given by these documents is one of remarkable continuity and cultural resilience. Such an impression would be accurate. Compared against the schema developed by Kartunnen and Lockhart (1976) that reduces mutation and hispanization in Nahuatl to three stages, the Maya below of 1812 is still in Stage Two, which, in Central Mexico, ended around 1640. In fact, this early nineteenth-century Maya seems barely even Stage Two, which Lockhart describes as being characterized by the borrowing of Spanish words "readily and copiously" (forthcoming: 13). Spanish loanwords in the 1812 text seem short of copious; the petitioners even avoid the use of the word *elección*, which has been in their language for at least two centuries.

But judged by Lockhart's specific criteria for Nahuatl, this is Stage Two indigenous material. The words that have been loaned describe elements introduced by the Spaniards (in Stage One the Nahuas had resorted to using term-compilations and various kinds of neologisms; the Maya too went through such a stage, over before the time of our first document below). The examples from all the documents below fall less in the category of new material objects than in the context of Spanish methods of measurement and organization. The introduction of the Roman alphabet, Spanish book-keeping and Spanish currency lead to *letrail*, *libroil* and *cafirma*, and *peso*. The date is always in Spanish, whilst

words for year (*hab*) and day (*helel*, today) remain Maya. Yucatán is referred to as such, and as the province (*promiçiasil*). Office names reflect the imposition of Spanish organization onto a similar pre-existing system, and the subsequent conceptual reconciliation of the two over time, as discussed above. Because the city of Mérida was built on the site of the Maya town of Tiho, the Maya continued to call it Tiho into the twentieth century; in 1707 we see *merida tiho*, but in 1801 simply *t ho* (*t* or *ti* is the locative preposition, and as such can be removed from a place-name, to leave *ho* or *kanto*).

Another criterion for classifying these texts is the level of grammatical change, which here is virtually nil. All the loans are nouns, and are treated as Maya nouns, given, for example, the *-il* ending of a possessed noun. In the case of *cafirma*, the Spanish noun for signature appears to be treated as a Maya verb and placed after a subject pronoun (we sign)—although the distinction in Maya between nouns and verbs is blurred even when existent, and the same prefixes function as subject and possessive pronouns. Likewise there are also examples below of loans with the Maya plural *-ob*.

In effect these loans cease to be Spanish words, and become Maya ones, not only in sense of their grammatical treatment, but also in their pronunciation. The same applies to the Christian names used by the Maya. Because there was no written language as such, and the notary attempted to record simply what was being said, the spelling of loan-words lends a marvelous insight into the usage of such terms. The Maya lacked *r*, but had *r*, as illustrated by the spelling *mayol*. No new sounds were created, but letters were added or dropped until the word was comfortably Mayanized. *Provincia* thus becomes, with its possessed ending, *promiçiasil*. In other documents this word will appear in different form, as the adaptation was not always standard. (Some words seemed to defy adaptation; I have noted nine different spellings of *conosimiento* in Maya documents from Tekanto alone.)

**The documents.** The transcriptions are my own. In particular the 1706 document, which is in poor condition, exhibits paleographic problems. I also take responsibility for all translation errors, whilst being grateful to Marta Hunt and James Lockhart for their assistance with the translating of the 1706 and 1812 documents, to Tulane University for access to the 1612 and 1812, and to Victoria Bricker for access to the 1706.

*Sabacche f.62 1612/1801***Election of Officers in Ticul for 1612***Beluaalob utial haab de mil seiscientos y dose años uay ti**Auda Sn Anto ticul**Gaspar coba Dn Diego Chable  
chable**Matias**Alonso chuc**Batab**Franco Ku**Alcs**Antonio Pedro coba esno**Gaspar Uc**Diego tzun Regs**toon Batab the Jusas Regs y lix esno uay ti auda Sn Anto  
ticul lic alic than t ho chahi u elecl hab de mil seis cientos y  
dose hebix yanil ychil u libroil elecon ti maix hunpel  
uletrail tin luksah maix tin >ah xan lay uhahil uay ti auda  
yanix cafirma yalan cabal helel en 28 de 9bre de 1801**franco kuyoc**Capn Dn Mdo Camal**Calisto Noh**Manl chan**Batab**Alcd**Pedro Ytza**Agustin Canche the**Juan ventra**>ul**Silvtre may Regs**esno*

The appointment of officers for the year 1612 here at the court of San Antonio Ticul:

Gaspar Coba, Alonso Chuc, Alcaldes; Don Diego Chable, Batab; Antonio Pedro Coba, Notary; Matias Chable, Francisco Ku, Gaspar Uc, Diego Tzun, Regidores.

We the Batab, Lieutenant, Justices, Regidores and also the notary, here of the court of San Antonio Ticul, take to Mérida the ordering of the election of the year 1612, as it appears in the election book. I neither took away nor added a single letter. This is the truth. Here at the court, we sign below, today, the 28th of September, 1801.

Francisco Kuyoc, Manuel Chan, Pedro Itza, Silvestre May, Regidores; Capitan Don Menehildo Camal, Batab; Agustin Canche, Lieutenant; Calisto Noh, Alcalde; Juan Ventura Dzul, Notary.

*Tekanto f.29 1706***Election of Officers in Tekanto for 1707**

uay ti cah santo agustin tekanto u tabal[?]. gouer[nador]  
 merida tiho u hol u promiçiasil yucatan hele e... tiçiembre de  
 1706 años ti o cannobix uay ti auden[cia] ti cabidosob franco  
 ku juan puch diego chan gaspal ... regidoresob geromo cach  
 agustin pat alcaldesob ti u ta[nil] lucas camal escribano  
 mahacenile utanukunul tun tic ... tunul alcaldesob  
 regidoresob mayordomosob aluasilesob ... ualaccob yehil  
 yabil = 1707 años cutalele lay sahlemoni ti ca [yu]mil ti  
 dios rey ca noh ahau rey ah tepal hex cat >oci u multi[c]cobe  
 ca tu ihi[?] can nu[?]tahob tutan almehen sr capptan [Dn]  
 Agustin de Palansuela gor uay ti cah lae tuchih ... hixan u  
 thanil cala ac bin mektanticcob utanlahul r[?]. ah tepal he  
 li lay ti tuntabob uay ti audiencia real chunuc cah ... heli lay  
 >iban ukabaob uay cabale -----

-----  
 alongo couoh ----- Ju camal alcalde ...  
 Juan tep ----- alcalde meson -----  
 anto hau berno baz franco canul franco puch -----  
 regidoresob -----  
 po ku ----- pur[?]latro -----  
 andres may ----- aluasi mayol -----  
 andres baz ----- mayordomo -----  
 felipe may berno. hau gaspr hau matheo p...  
 antō canche pablo hau aluasilesob

-----  
 diego balam ----- madamiento -----  
 lucas balam ----- madamiento -----

-----  
 antō hau ----- esno ----- arañeíl -----  
 juan may --6 peso-- 6 peso ----- maestro  
 juan chan ----- tupil doctrina ----- madamiento

-----  
 lay ti soci ti cob cabidosob alcaldesob caix tu yalahob u  
 binsalob tu tan ca noh tzicbenil yum ti sr gor uchebal uchih  
 nutic u thanil elecçion uay ti audiencia r[e]jal santo agustin  
 tekanto hele en ... de tiçiembre de 1706 años -----

Agustin Palensuela [rub.]

Here in the town of San Agustin Tekanto, before the Governor of Mérida, the capital of the province of Yucatán, on this day, the...of December, 1706, meeting here in the court are the members of the cabildo: Francisco Ku, Juan Puch, Diego Chan, Gaspar..., the Regidores; Geronimo Cach, Agustin Pat, the Alcaldes. Before Lucas Camal, the notary, appeared...all the alcaldes, regidores, mayordomos and alguaciles appointed for the coming year, 1707. Fearing of God the Father, King, Great Lord and Ruler, they are assembled...before the noble, Señor Capitan Agustin de Palensuela, Governor here in this town, mandated ... next they shall govern and serve...the ruler. Finally here in the royal court, the cornerstone of the town... thus are their names written here below:

Alonso Couoh, Juan Camal, Alcaldes; Juan Tep, Alcalde Meson; Antonio Hau, Bernardo Baz, Francisco Canul, Francisco Puch, Regidores; Pedro Ku, Porter[?]; Andres May, Chief Alguasil; Andres Baz, Mayordomo; Felipe May, Bernardo Hau, Gaspar Hau, Matheo P..., Antonio Canche, Pablo Hau, Alguaciles; Diego Balam, Lucas Balam, warrant officers; Antonio Hau, Notary, duty officer; Juan May, Maestro; Juan Chan, teacher, warrant officer.

Thus is concluded the meeting of the members of the cabildo and the alcaldes, ordered to appear before his honor, the Señor Governor, so that the election statement be put in order here in the royal court...San Agustin Tekanto, on this day,...of December, 1706. [signature:] Agustin Palensuela

### *Xcupilcacab f.2 1812*

#### **Petition from Xcupilcacab to Replace Their Batab, 1812**

*Ton con the y Justs y Regores y Esno likulon uay tu mektan cahil cilich yum ah Bolon pixan san Anto Xcupilcacab licil chi cantal tu tanil Cayumil ti Ds y tu tanil unoh tzicbenil yn yum denfensor utial cau met ton utz tu kaba cayumil ti Ds u mansic okotba than tu tanil u noh tzicbenil yn yum halach uinic Bay bic tumen ton ne >oc u hach lubul otzilil ti lay cah yoklal minan mamac than oklal tumenel yn yum Batabe >oc uhach chihil minan upucsikal utial uthan oklal u halkab maon mental olah ton katic tun uyatzilil ti cayumil ti Ds y u noh tzicbenil yn yum halach uinic utial ca yanac uhel yn yum Batab utial mektan ton ti lay cah y u canbeson ti u yalmah thanil cayumil ti Ds he ālic ton = ychil cantul Regores y unuctacil uincob ti lay cah bicil yn yum Rafael tzin katic uyatzilil ca yanac u yocol umektanton ti lay cah*

tumenel >oc kaholtic uyacuntah >oc umentic] u alcalde  
mesonil >oc umen ti u Regor mayoril >oc umentic u  
tenienteil xan lay unucul >oc kaholtic bicil hach malob  
uyacuntic cah u ca>ice yum felipe tzab Bay xan >oc umentic  
u Regor mayorilil lay unucul >oc kaholtic uyacun tic cah xan  
u yox>ice Benito Puc Bay xan >oc kaholtic bicil malob uinic  
y cuxolal halil u xul than ti cayumil ti Ds y u noh tzicbenil  
yn yum Denfensor y unoh tzicbenil yn yum halach uinic lay  
uhahil cafirma cabal helel en 15 de febrero de 1812

franco Balam the.

Martin Naal

Baltesar tun

Jn Jose May

Anto Pech Alcaldes

Juan May

toribio Ek

Regores

Damaso Baaz Esno

We the Lieutenant, Justices, Regidores and Notary are from here, the town of San Antonio Xcupilcacab, where we are appearing before our Lord God and before his great honor m'lord Defensor, through whose good services, and in the name of our Lord God, our petition is presented to his great honor m'lord Governor of Yucatán. Wherefore, a great misery has befallen us: We have nobody to represent us, because m'lord Batab has grown very old and has lost the heart to rule. He is weak of mind and no longer desires to represent us. We request as a favor before our Lord God and his great honor m'lord Governor of the Province that there be a change of the lord Batab that governs us in this town and teaches us the commandments of our Lord God. Among the four Regidors and other principal men appointed in this town, m'lord Rafael Tzin requests the favor of governing us in this town, because he is of sound mind and has served as Alcalde Meson, Chief Regidor and also as Lieutenant. It is understood and remembered how very well he protects the town. Secondly, m'lord Felipe Tzab also served as Chief Regidor. It is understood and known that he protects the town also. Thirdly, there is Benito Puc. He too is known as a good man and an intelligent one. This completes and ends the statement made before our Lord God and his great honor m'lord Defensor and his great honor m'lord Governor of Yucatán. This is the truth. We sign below on this day, the 15th February, 1812.

Francisco Balam, Lieutenant; Baltesar Tun, Antonio Pech, Alcaldes; Martin Naal, Juan Jose May, Juan May, Toribio Ek, Regidores; Damaso Baaz, Escribano.

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