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Tmesis and verb second in Early Irish syntax

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0. Introduction

The syntax of Early Irish largely resembles that of Modern Irish in that VSO order is general at even the earliest attested stages:^{1,2}

- (1) **béoididir** in spirut in corp in fecht so (Old Irish) Wb. 13d7
 béoididir.3SG.PRES the spirit the body the time this
 'The spirit vivifies the body now.'
- (2) **beonn** an spiorad an corp an feacht seo (Modern Irish)
 vivifies the spirit the body the time this
 'The spirit vivifies the body now.'

Nonetheless, a number of exceptions to verb-initial order are present in Old Irish syntax, found mostly in poetry and rhyming prose. The most celebrated examples are 'Bergin's Construction' (Bergin 1938, Binchy 1979-80) and the archaic construction known as 'Tmesis' (Greene 1977, Watkins 1963). In recent work (Doherty 1998, Koch 1987), it has been shown that Bergin's Construction reduces to a Verb Second construction (also §2 below). In addition to other evidence, this strongly suggests that Old Irish is a 'residual Verb Second' language, i.e. that at some stage prior to the Old Irish record, Verb Second was productive in Irish.³

Tmesis occurs with compound verbs and consists in placing a phrase in a position intermediate between a preverb and the verbal root, 'splitting' the compound verb apart. In the following example with the compound verb *ad-cí* 'see', the subject is preposed:

- (3)a. **ad-** cruth caín **-cichither** (Tmesis) (Watkins 1963:32)
 ad form fair ad-cí.3SG.FUT.PASS
 'fair form will be seen.'
- b. **ad-cichither** cruth caín (normal order)

This constituent is not limited to subjects: preposed objects and oblique phrases are also attested, reminiscent of Verb Second topicalization.

Tmesis is usually taken to reflect an inherited Indo-European V-final word order (e.g. Watkins 1963:35).⁴ The purpose of this paper, however, is to argue that another explanation is possible, in particular, that Tmesis plausibly reduces to a Verb Second residue. The crux of the argument is that preverbs (*ad*, above) are in the C° position and that Tmesis, therefore, reduces to Verb Second in the presence of overt C°, analogous to 'embedded Verb Second' in languages like Yiddish and Icelandic (albeit in root clauses). In addition to providing the basis for an explanation of an otherwise mysterious construction, this proposal has some theoretical implications for the competing analyses of (embedded) Verb Second, discussed in §4 below.

1. Residual Verb Second in Old Irish

1.1. Bergin's Construction

This construction is attested exclusively in poetry and high-register texts (the alliterative prose of 'rhetorics', *rosc* and the rhythmical portions of the laws); see Bergin (1938:197); Carney (1977-9:431). The construction is exceptional in two respects: (i) the verb is non-initial; (ii) it bears special 'conjunct' or 'prototonic' morphology, normally reserved for verbs immediately following C° (§2 below):

- (4) [XP] V_[CONJ/PROTO]... (Bergin's Construction)

This construction reduces to Verb Second in a fairly obvious way. The verb is in second position and is preceded by a syntactic constituent, either a subject, an object or an oblique phrase, respectively:

Verb-medial

Subject-initial

- (5) [Lugaib Luath] **loisc** trebthu trín tuath
 L. Swift loiscid.3SG.PRET.CONJ dwellings strong peoples
 'Lugaib the Swift, burned the dwellings of strong peoples.'
 (Carney 1977-9:432)

Object-initial

- (6) [BÇngluinn] **gnÿ** glenn gaeth
 bloodless.deed gníid.3SG.PRES.CONJ valleys.GEN wind
 'The wind of the valleys does a bloodless deed'
 (Carney 1977-9:433)

Adjunct-initial

- (7) [srethaib sluag] **soí** Crimthan Coscrach cing
 lines.DAT hosts sóid.3SG.PRET.CONJ C. victorious champion
 céit catha
 100 battles
 'With lines of hosts, C. the Victorious the champion won (turned) a hundred battles.'
 (Carney 1977-9:433)

Verb-final

Subject-initial

- (8) [molad cóir] **canar**
 praise just canaid.3SG.PRES.PASS.CONJ
 'Fitting praise is sung.'
 (Watkins 1963:34)

Object-initial

- (9) [maicni nAilb] **áirmi**
 sons.ACC Alb.GEN ad-rími.2SG.PRES.PROTO
 'You reckon the sons of Alb.'
 (Carney 1977-9:433)

Adjunct-initial

- (10) [*ÿ* *testaib* *cÿraib*] **cengur**
 from witnesses.DAT just.DAT cingid.3SG.PASS.PRES.CONJ
 'One proceeds from proper witnesses.'
 (Watkins 1963:34)

In addition to this structural evidence, there is morphological evidence for a Verb Second analysis from the use of conjunct and prototonic verbal forms, as discussed in §2 below.^{5,6}

1.2. Interrogatives

There are two main strategies for forming constituent questions in Old Irish, and in both the verb is in second position. In one strategy, the verb appears in the relative form:

- (11)a. *cía rannas* *dúib?*
 who rannid.3SG.PRES.REL for.2PL
 'Who (is it that) divides for you?'
 (GOI 288)
- b. *cid as* *dénti?*
 what COP.3SG.PRES.REL to.be.done
 'What (is it which is) to be done?'
 (GOI:288)

As the verb is in relative form, this strategy is possibly based on cleft sentences, as indicated in the translations above.

The other strategy, which Bergin (1938) claims to be older, differs in that the verb is non-relative. Instead it is in the special conjunct or prototonic form which usually follows overt complementizers (Bergin 1938:205):

- (12)a. *cia beir* *búar o thig Temrach?*
 who beirid.3SG.PRES.CONJ cattle from house Tara.GEN
 'Who brings cattle from the house of Tara? ...'
 (Bergin 1938, 205)
- b. *cia acca?*
 who ad-cí.2SG.PRET.PROTO
 'Who did you see?'
 (Bergin 1938:206)
- c. *co acci* *in slúag?*
 how ad-cí.2SG.PRES.PROTO the host
 'How seest thou the host?'
 (GOI:290)

While these constructions do not definitively indicate Verb Second, they are at least descriptively Verb Second and are, therefore, plausible instances of Verb Second residues.

1.3. Quotative Construction

Another construction which can be interpreted as a Verb Second residue involves the defective verb *ol* (which does not inflect for person, number or tense):

- (13) **ol** Ísu són
say Jesus that
'Jesus said that.'

Wb. 6c30

In addition to verb-initial sentences (13), it is also found in second position, with the quoted clause preposed to initial position, (14):

- (14)a. 'is sochruidiu láam oldó-sa' **ol** coss
COP.3SG.PRES comlier hand than.I say foot
'Hand is comelier than I' says Foot.'

Wb. 12b21

- b. 'anatammresa' **ol** Dia
when-at.reig.1SG.FUT.EMPH say God
'When I shall arise', says God'.

Ml. 31c14

Again, this construction is descriptively Verb Second and therefore a plausible instance of a Verb Second residue.

1.4. Summary

In addition to Bergin's Construction, other constructions in Old Irish syntax are consistent with an analysis as Verb Second residues. While neither interrogatives or the quotative construction discussed above in themselves definitively indicate an earlier Verb Second stage, together with Bergin's Construction, they provide additional support for the proposal that Old Irish is a residual Verb Second language.

In following sections, it will be argued that Tmesis provides further support for the same conclusion. First, however, we must take a closer look at Old Irish verbal morphology and at compound verbs, in particular.

2. Old Irish Verbal Morphology

The verbal morphology of Old Irish is notoriously complex in that simple verbs distinguish two paradigms, varying with syntactic position, i.e. the 'absolute' and 'conjunct' endings, illustrated below for the simple verb *beirid* 'carry' in the present indicative:

- | | | | | |
|------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| (15) | | <i>Absolute</i> | <i>Conjunct</i> | |
| | Sg. 1. | biru | ·biur | |
| | 2. | biri | ·bir | |
| | 3. | berid, -ith | ·beir | |
| | Pl. 1. | berm(a)i | ·beram | |
| | 2. | beirthe | ·berid -ith | |
| | 3. | ber(a)it | ·berat | (GOI:360) |

Conjunct endings typically appear on a verb which immediately follows one of the 'conjunct particles', examples of which are provided below, (see GOI:28):

(16)	in	INTERROGATIVE	<i>Conjunct Particles</i>
	ní	NEG	
	co / con	'so that'	
	dia	'if'	
	ara	'in order that'	

Only conjunct endings may appear immediately following a conjunct particle:

(17)	beirid	'carries'	ní·beir (*ní·beirid)	'does not carry'
	gairid	'calls'	ní·gair (*ní·gairid)	'does not call'

Compound verbs (§3 below) also distinguish a special morphological form following conjunct particles, i.e. the 'prototonic' form, which contrasts with the default 'deuterotonic' form. These often differ radically in appearance:

	<i>Deuterotonic</i>		<i>Prototonic</i>	
(18)	as·beir	'says'	ní·epir	'does not say'
	ad·cí	'sees'	ní·aicci	'does not see'
	do·beir	'gives'	ní·tab(a)ir	'does not give'
	do·gní	'does'	ní·déní	'does not do'

As the syntactic distribution of prototonic forms is (more or less) identical to that of conjunct forms of simple verbs, the term 'dependent' is often used as a cover term for conjunct and prototonic forms and 'independent' for absolute and deuterotonic forms.

A number of properties indicates that the 'conjunct particles' are functional heads of the C° class (complementizers). First, they are stressless, presentential, proclitic elements which introduce different clause-types. Second, they host enclitic pronouns:

(19)	ní·m	·charat·sa	Wb.5c6
	NEG-CL.1SG	caraid.3PL.PRES.CONJ.EMPH	
		'They do not love me.'	

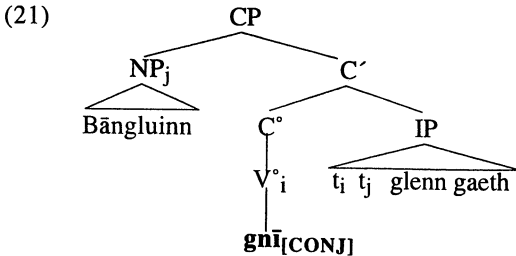
If these are viewed as C°-oriented clitic pronouns which indicate the IP/CP boundary (analogous to similar pronouns in Germanic), then the presence of the conjunct particle in C° is clearly shown (see also Carnie *et al.* 1995).

The basic generalization governing the distribution of dependent and independent forms is straightforward, therefore:⁷

- (20) Dependent verbal forms are associated with clauses which project to CP (C° selects for a +DEP feature on I°). Independent forms are associated with minimal clauses which project only to IP.

This generalization is also supported by the observation that dependent forms appear in clauses with no overt complementizer, but in which CP is projected under usual assumptions, e.g. *wh*-interrogatives (§ 1.2. above) and imperatives (Doherty 1999). Furthermore, it predicts that dependent forms will appear in Verb Second sentences, as under standard assumptions CP is projected in these clauses. Remarkably, this prediction is borne out in Bergin's Construction (§1.1.), in which

the verb uniformly bears dependent morphology, assuming that the Verb Second topic appears in the Specifier of CP:



Finally, this proposal has some implications for the historical debate on the origins of the absolute and conjunct endings, which are traditionally thought to reflect Indo-European primary and secondary endings (Sims-Williams 1984). In particular, the system outlined above entails that conjunct endings must have been general at the previous Verb Second stage, as (almost) all clauses would involve the projection of CP. Although this issue cannot be discussed in any detail here, this hypothesis is consistent with the recent proposals of Sims-Williams (1984), who claims that the absolute/conjunct distinction is not, in fact, a reflex of the Indo-European primary/secondary endings. Rather the absolute endings are a relatively recent innovation, derived from the conjunct paradigm by syntactic processes.

3. Compound Verbs

Before we can investigate Tmesis further, we must first examine compound verbs in more detail. Old Irish makes extensive use of compound verbs. They consist of a verbal root compounded with one or more prepositional preverbs:

(22)	<i>gairid</i>	'calls'	V
	<i>do-gair</i>	'summons'	P-V
	<i>for-cum-gair</i>	'commands'	P-PV
	<i>do-air-n-gair</i>	'promises'	P-PPV

(McCone 1987:1)

There is strong syntactic evidence that compound verbs involve the obligatory projection of CP and, in particular, that the initial preverb occupies the C° position.

First, compound verbs obligatorily take conjunct endings. The verbal root cannot appear in absolute form in a compound verb, (*gairid*, below):

(23)	* <i>do-gairid</i>	'summons'
	* <i>for-cum-gairid</i>	'commands'
	* <i>do-air-n-gairid</i>	'promises'

Second, preverbs are syntactically identical to conjunct particles (C°), in that they also host enclitic pronouns, indicating the presence of the preverb in C°:

(24)	<i>imm-um</i>	<i>-ruidbed</i>	Wb. 23d30
	<i>imm-CL1SG</i>	<i>imm-dfben.PERF.PASS</i>	
	'I have been circumcised.'		

Furthermore, Old Irish lacks a general subordinating C° corresponding to Modern Irish *go* 'that', but instead often uses initial mutation (nasalization) as a marker of subordination:

- (25) *frisalear* *mbís* *qui ar chintech* Sg. 207a3
 fris·acci.3SG.PRES be.3SG.CONS.PRES.REL(NAS) *qui* for definite
 'He expects that *qui* is used for the definite.'

Note that with compound verbs, however, the nasalization appears to the *right* of the initial preverb:

- (26) *bad* *nertad* *dúib* in so *a·n-éirsid* Wb. 25b25
 COP.3SG.IMP strengthening for.2PL this, a-t-reig.2PL.FUT.(NAS)
 'Let this be a strengthening for you, that ye will rise again.'

Assuming that subordinating nasalization is associated with the CP projection, examples such as (26) above clearly indicate the presence of the preverb in C° .

It is not immediately obvious, however, why the preverb should appear in C° . There are two logical possibilities. First, the preverb moves to C° , due to a filled C° requirement, either prosodic (Adger 1998) or syntactic (Carnie *et al* 1995):

- (27) [CP [C[°] for_j [IP [I' [I [v_i t_j ·con-gair] [v_P [v t_i]]]]]]]

The second possibility is that the preverbs are merged in C° , entailing an anti-lexicalist approach to morphology:

- (28) [CP for [CP con [IP [I' [I [v_i ·gair] [v_P [v t_i]]]]]]]

Whichever option ultimately turns out to be correct, the syntactic evidence in favor of the preverb being in the C° position is overwhelming.

4. Tmesis

This rare construction is not productive in Old Irish syntax, but is mostly attested in archaic sources (see Greene 1977), precisely the environment in which residual syntax is expected. In tmetic sentences, an argument of a compound verb (a subject, object or oblique phrase) intervenes between the verbal root and the preverb. The following examples illustrate the pattern. Note that unlike Bergin's Construction, many examples of Tmesis appear in relative clauses:⁸

- (29)a. *ad-* [*cruth caín*] -*cichither* (Watkins 1963:32)
 form fair ad·cí.3SG.FUT.PASS
 'Fair form will be seen.'

- b. *ad-* [*mlechti márbóis*] -*moínigter* (AM§18)
 milk-yields great.cattle.GEN ad·maínigid.3PL.PRES
 'Milk-yields of great cattle are maintained'

- (30)a. *ath-* [*mórchathu fri crícha connámat*] -*cuirethar* (AM§15)
 great.battallions against borders enemies ath.cuirethar.3SG.PRES
 '(He) dispatches (great) battalions to the borders of hostile neighbours.'

b. ónd ríg **do-** [rea] **rúasat** (GOI:327)
 from.the king spaces do-fuissim.3SG.PERF
 'From the King who has created (celestial) spaces.'

(31)a. **immus-** [hua Chorcc] **-ebla** (Watkins 1963:32)
 imm.CL-3PL from Cork imm-aigid.3SG.FUT.CONJ
 'He shall drive them from Cork?'

b. **inde-** coruib **-cuirithur** (Watkins 1963:32)
 in.CL-3PL contracts.DAT in-cuirethar.3SG.PRES.REL
 'Who puts them in with contracts.'

The usual Verb Second topicalization pattern is observed in these examples: a phrase (subject, object, oblique) immediately precedes the verb. Assuming that preverbs are in C°, it follows that Tmesis reduces to Verb Second in the presence of overt C° (the preverb).

In order for this proposal to be tenable, Tmesis (Verb Second) should also be attested with simple verbs preceded by non-lexical complementizers (i.e. conjunct particles). This prediction is clearly borne out. Tmesis is also found with particles such as *ma* 'if', the tense/aspect markers *ro* and *no* and the negative marker *ní*.⁹

(32)a. **ma** ratha **roiset** Kelly (1986:6)
 if guarantors ro-saig.3PL.FUT.CONJ
 'If guarantors arrive'

b. **ma ro-** laídib **-lammis** Kelly (1986:1)
 if ro lays.DAT lamaid.1PL.IMPF.SUBJ
 'If we dare in lays'

c. **nom** Choimmdiu **coíma** Sg. 290.11
 PRT.CL-1SG Lord cóemaid.3SG.PRES.SUBJ.CONJ
 'May the Lord cherish me.'

d. **ní** mmo guin **-immgabaim** Kelly (1986:2)
 NEG my death imm-imgaib.1SG.PRES
 'I do not shun my death.'

Tmesis (Verb Second) is also found in embedded clauses with the complementizer particle *co* 'so that, and', Kelly (1986, 6):

(33)a. **con** Níell **noífither**
 PRT Níell nóebaid.FUT.PASS
 'And [so that] Niell shall be extolled';

b. **cu** Loígaire lonn **lénfether** inda Táilcend techt,
 PRT Loígaire fierce lénaid.FUT.PASS the Adze-heads come.INF
 'And fierce Loígaire will be grieved by the coming of the Adze-heads.'

c. *forcedar* *cin* *co fercach*,
 attach.PRES.PASS.3SG liability to angry.one

con *fri* *fuili* **foichlit[h]er**
 PRT against wounds fu-*cfallathar*.PASS
 'Liability is attached to the angry man, and [so that] heed is paid to wounds.'

d. **con**-*den Daire Drechlethan -dailfa* (Watkins 1963, 32)
 PRT -3SG Daire Drechlethan *dáilid*.3SG.FUT
 'And [so that] D.D will distribute it.'

Although *co* is often translated 'and' by text-editors, it is syntactically a conjunct particle, rather than a conjunction. Note that it hosts enclitic pronouns, as in (33)d. Furthermore, *co* is a stressless proclitic and is the source for the Middle / Modern Irish subordinating C° *go* 'that'. Therefore, it is clearly a C° element rather than a conjunction.

4.1. Theoretical Implications

If Tmesis reduces to embedded Verb Second, it is an interesting question which of the two competing analyses of this phenomenon are more appropriate for the Irish data. Initially, it seems that both the 'recursive CP' analysis (e.g. Holmberg 1986) and the 'Spec of IP' analysis (e.g. Diesing 1990) are compatible with Tmesis, assuming the preverb is in C° :

(34) [CP [C'ad [CP [XP cruth caín] [IP [I' **cichither**]]]]] (Recursive CP)

(35) [CP [C'ad [IP [XP cruth caín] [I' **cichither**]]]] (Spec IP)

However, if Spec IP is available as a Verb Second position in tmesic sentences, it is unclear why CP should project in other Verb Second clauses (e.g. Bergin's Construction). Under the generalization about verbal morphology proposed in §2 above, if only IP projects in Bergin's Construction, then the verb should bear independent, rather than dependent, morphology. At this stage in the language, therefore, the evidence favors a recursive CP analysis of Tmesis and embedded Verb Second. If an IP-internal Verb Second position were admitted to the grammar, then the fact that other Verb Second sentences bear dependent morphology would not be predicted.¹⁰

5. Conclusions

In sum, the purpose of this paper has been to show that Tmesis plausibly reduces to a Verb Second residue, for which there is considerable syntactic evidence: (i) Tmesis is largely restricted to archaic sources, in which residual syntax is expected; (ii) the preposed constituent is thematically diverse, as in Verb Second topicalization; (iii) there is strong evidence that the (leftmost) preverb of a compound verb is in the C° position; and (iv) Tmesis is also attested with simple verbs preceded by non-lexical C° (conjunct particles).

It is important to point out, however, that in almost every example of Tmesis discussed here, the verb is in final position:

(36) P. [XP] V

In the historical literature, this observation is usually taken to reflect an inherited Indo-European V-final order, rather than residual Verb Second (e.g. Watkins 1963:35).¹¹

Unfortunately, Tmesis is a rare construction, however, and very few good examples of it are attested (McCone 1979:19). The data which would definitively distinguish Verb Second from verb-final word order in Tmesis of compound verbs (e.g. examples with both lexical subject and object) seem to be unattested. Therefore, this issue remains essentially unresolved, unless some more decisive examples come to light. Nonetheless, the observation that no attested examples are verb-medial may simply represent a gap in the data. This conclusion is rendered more likely by the fact that some examples of Tmesis with simple verbs and conjunct particles are, in fact, verb-medial, e.g. (32)b above, and so indicate Verb Second over verb-final order.

Notes

¹I would like to thank Andrew Garrett for very helpful comments on this paper. The author alone is responsible for any errors or omissions, however.

²As Old Irish verbal morphology often leads to quite opaque verbal forms, all verbs are glossed by their citation form (third singular present indicative), rather than the English translation. In addition, verbs are boldfaced throughout the text for clarity. Primary sources are cited using standard abbreviations (after *Dictionary of the Irish Language*, Royal Irish Academy), a key for which is provided at the end of the paper.

³Continuous Irish prose is attested from about the beginning of the eighth century. The term 'Early Irish' is used as a cover term for both Old Irish and Middle Irish, which are dated from 700-900AD, and from 900-1200AD, respectively, following the usage of McCone (1994) and Greene (1977). The main sources of reliable Old Irish prose from contemporary manuscripts are glosses and commentaries on Latin texts, which survived in continental Europe and which are known by their medieval locations, e.g. the Würzburg, Milan and St. Gall glosses, published in Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (eds.) *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* 1901-3. The Würzburg glosses are generally regarded as being the earliest (c. 700AD). A great deal of native literature and other material is also attested. See the introduction to Thurneysen (1946) for further references.

⁴Constructions similar to Old Irish Tmesis are also attested in Hittite, Vedic and Homeric Greek (Watkins 1963: 37-8). These are beyond the scope of this paper, however.

⁵As noted by Watkins (1963:33; 49), there are no (or very few) examples of this construction in relative clauses. Given that Verb Second word order is often excluded from relative environments (e.g. in German), this finding is unsurprising under a Verb Second analysis. See Kelly (1976:xxxvii) for some more possible examples of Bergin's Construction in relatives.

⁶There are also a significant number of examples of Bergin's Construction which are not obviously Verb Second. Instead, the verb appears in third position. See Doherty 1998.

⁷This generalization is actually too strong as it stands because the parallelism in syntactic distribution between prototonic forms of compound verbs and conjunct endings on simple verbs is not exact. For example, in the imperative, which effectively takes the conjunct endings, deuterotonic forms of the verb are used when an enclitic pronoun is present.

⁸It is important to point out that these examples are drawn from the discursive literature on Tmesis (in particular, Greene 1977, Kelly 1976, 1986 and Watkins 1963), not from an independent survey of the Old Irish corpus. Although it is not immediately obvious that the preposed material in (30)a is a single syntactic constituent, this example is included, as it is one of the few examples of a preposed object in the literature on Tmesis.

⁹In Greene's (1977) terminology, 'Tmesis I' is tmesis of a compound verb; 'Tmesis II' occurs with the negative particles and 'Tmesis III' with other preverbal particles, as in (32)-(33).

¹⁰In Doherty (1999), however, an IP-internal Verb Second position is proposed for Verb Second sentences with independent verbal forms, brought to light in Mac Cana (1973).

¹¹Thanks to Andrew Garrett for discussion surrounding this issue.

Abbreviations

AM = *Audacht Morainn*, Fergus Kelly (ed.), Dublin: 1976.

GOI = Rudolf Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, Dublin: 1946.

MI. = Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (eds.), *The Milan glosses on the psalms*, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* 1 (1901), Cambridge, 499-712.

Sg. = Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (eds.), *Glosses on Priscian (St. Gall)*, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* 2 (1901), Cambridge, 49-224.

Wb. = Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (eds.), *Glosses on the Pauline Epistles*, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus* 1 (1901), Cambridge, 499-712.

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