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The Turks in the Sixth Century

IN the ENGLISH HISTORICAL REVIEW of July 1896, and in the 'Academy' of December 21, 1895, the Chinese scholar Mr. E. H. Parker has made a contribution of distinct value to the question of the origin of the Turks. He shows, from Chinese sources, that the Turks were a branch of the Hiung-nu; that they were subject to the Geougen from about the middle of the fifth to the middle of the sixth century; that they assumed the name Türk in the first half of the sixth century; and that about A.D. 548 they threw off the yoke of the Geougen. The general outline of these events had been already given by Deguignes and Gibbon, but Mr. Parker presents it in a clearer and correcter form. The most important conclusion established by Mr. Parker seems to me to be the identification of the Golden Mountain, which was the residence of the khans known to Chinese history. We can hardly hesitate to accept his view that their seat was in, or close to, the province of Kansuh, north-east of the Kok o Nor range. It was here, in the iron country, that Tumen, the smiter of the Geougen, and Mukan, the conqueror of the Ephthalites, governed their people on the lower slopes of the Kin-shan or Golden Mountains. But the name Kin-shan is also applied by the Chinese to the Altai, a long way to the north; and this ambiguity misled Mr. Parker's predecessors into seeking there the residence of Tumen and the khans who followed him. The evidence of the Greek historian Menander had seemed to confirm this theory. Ektág, or the Golden Mountain, which a Roman embassy visited in A.D. 568, is most naturally identified with the Altai. Mr. Parker justly retains this identification, and therefore distinguishes the residence of Tumen and Mukan from Ektág.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Parker had not an acquaintance at first hand with the Greek historians, especially Menander and Theophylactus. Although he knows all the main facts, and has had the advantage of information from Mr. Tozer, he has fallen, as was quite natural, into some mistakes, which he would have avoided if he had had the original texts or complete and literal translations before him. The same danger attends the western scholar when he deals at second hand with Oriental sources; and it is to be hoped that Mr. Parker may decide to publish a literal and authoritative version of the most important notices in the Chinese annals, relating to the Turkish khans of the sixth century, on the same plan as that adopted in the admirable work of Hirth, 'China and the Roman Orient.' But a few minor errors matter little,¹ and do not affect Mr. Parker's general interpretation of the data of the Greek historians. It is more serious when, in trying to reconcile the Chinese and Greek authorities, he does injustice to the general tenor of the Greek account. The story told by Menander has to be strained, if we follow Mr. Parker's method of bringing it into harmony with the Chinese chronicles. Mr. Parker has set a good example himself in distinguishing the two Golden Mountains. He should have carried the same principle a little further. In most cases it is much safer to reconcile by keeping apart than by bringing together.

I. In the year 568, when the first embassies passed between the Turks and the Roman empire, *Silzibil*² was the Turkish sovereign

¹ Thus Mr. Parker (misreading presumably Mr. Tozer's note) gives for *Tavγδορ* 'Tangast,' although there is no such variant in the manuscripts of Theophylactus; and suggests that we should read 'Taugast' (in which it is certainly tempting to find the *Tavgas* of the Orkhon inscriptions). Again, Mr. Parker speaks of 'Gibbon's mysterious Varchonites.' There is nothing mysterious about them. Turxanth calls the (false) Avars *Ὀβάρχοι* (in Menander, fr. 43); the name is of course the same as that meant by Theophylactus, who calls them *Ὀβάρ καὶ Χουννί*, breaking up the compound. Again, what does Mr. Parker mean by the statement that 'Theophanes the Confessor and Theophanes of Byzantium differ' as to the date of 'the first Turkish mission' to Constantinople? A very inaccurate statement has been made on the same point by Sir H. Howorth in his monograph on 'The Avars,' *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, 3rd ser. vol. i. p. 727, 1889.

² It occurs in three forms, *Dizabul*, fr. 18, 20, 21; *Dilzibil*, fr. 43; *Silzibil*, fr. 10, and *Suidas*. We must decide for the last, because it is confirmed by Tabari's *Sinğibu* (Nöldeke, p. 158); though one is tempted to guess that *Zilzibil* would be a closer transliteration than *Silzibil*. Mr. Parker ('E. H. R.' xi. 439) proposes to equate *abul* with *jabgu*, which is found in the Orkhon inscriptions. In *A Thousand Years of the Tartars*, p. 191, he was anxious to connect it with Shaporo, who was khan of the eastern Turks from A.D. 581 to 587. I must here mention two lines of Corippus, in *Laudem Iustinī*, 3, 390-1, which have been supposed to refer to the Turks without sufficient grounds (cp. Gibbon, ch. xlv., n. 5):

enscultor nostra servire paratus in aula
legatos nobis et plurima munera mittit.

For the mysterious *enscultor* Fogginus proposed *en Sultan*, which is accepted by Partsch, and may be regarded as the worst reading which appears in the text of his edition. Were it certain that it was a question of the Turks, *en Turcus* would be at

according to Menander, *Mukan* according to the Chinese authorities. There cannot be the least doubt that *Mukan* and *Silzibul* are different persons; *Mukan* dwelt in the southern Golden Mount, while *Ektág*, *Silzibul*'s residence, was the northern Golden Mount, *Altai*. The question then arises, What was the political relation of *Silzibul* to *Mukan*? Mr. Parker argues that *Silzibul* was a viceroy or governor of part of the Turkish dominion. He refers to the statement of *Maniach*, the Turkish envoy to Constantinople, who informed Justin that the Turkish realm was divided into four governments (*ἡγεμονίας*, Menander, p. 226, ed. Müller), and he assumes that *Silzibul* was one of the governors subordinate to *Mukan*. He illustrates this statement of Menander by a Chinese notice that, in the course of the years 581–587, four princes were reigning at the same time, namely, *Shaporo*, who was the chief khan, *Tat-t'ou*, and two others. But Mr. Parker does not seem to have made it quite clear to himself whether it is to be understood that there were one supreme khan and four subordinate khans, or one supreme khan and three subordinate khans. In the latter case—which is suggested by the Chinese notice—the supreme khan would govern directly one of the four governments into which his realm was divided.

Unfortunately this explanation is opposed to one of the leading facts in the account of Menander. If anything is clear in the narrative of this historian, it is the supremacy of *Silzibul*. Not merely is nothing hinted of his subordination to a higher monarch, but his own sovereignty above subordinate princes is asserted in unmistakable words. When *Maniach* explains the organisation of the realm in four governments, in the very same breath he attributes the supremacy over the whole realm to *Silzibul*.³ All through the story *Silzibul* appears as an irresponsible sovereign. If he had been only a governor, even though a member of the royal family, he could hardly have entered into independent negotiations with the Roman empire. It is in the highest degree improbable that Menander, who was a contemporary and had access to official sources of information, should have made a mistake on such a vital point. We are certainly not entitled to impute this blunder to him without clear proofs, and Mr. Parker's theory is thus open to a serious objection.

The only justifiable conclusion to draw from the data is that

least an inoffensive emendation. But there is no probability in such a reference. The poem appeared before the embassy of A.D. 568, and it, so far as we know, was the first embassy of the Turks. Theophanes (his authority is unknown) mentions an embassy to Justinian from *Askél*, king of the *Herméchiones*, an unknown people, in A.D. 562–3 (p. 239, ed. de Boor). Anastasius gives the name as *Asceltus*, but he merely annexed the article to the name (*Ascelti regis = Ασκηλ τοῦ ῥηγός*). One might guess that *en Ascel* should be restored to *Corippus*.

³ Τὸ δὲ γὰρ κράτος τοῦ ξύμπαντος ἔθνους δυνεῖσθαι μόνῳ τῷ Διὰβούλῳ.

there were at this time two distinct and independent Turkish realms. There was the northern realm of Silzibul, who lived in the northern Golden Mountain, and the southern realm of Mukan, who lived in the southern Golden Mountain. It might be imagined that the split took place in the reign of the first khan Tumen, and that the leader of the seceding Turks made the Altai a rival 'Golden Mountain.' But this is quite uncertain. The firm fact is, that in the reign of Justin II the Turkish empire fell into two divisions, which were at least as distinct and independent as the realms of Honorius and Arcadius, or of Anthemius and Leo.

II. Advancing over a period of eight years, we come to the second Roman embassy to the Turkish khan in 576.²⁴ It was sent by the new Caesar Tiberius to Silzibul. But, on arriving, the ambassadors found that Silzibul had just died, and his son Turxanth was preparing to perform the obsequies. The monarch was doubtless buried at Ektág, the Golden Mountain, but the ambassadors were stopped before they reached Ektág, at a military station, and Turxanth came (evidently from Ektág) to meet them. Turxanth is described by Menander as one of the chiefs or governors (*ἡγεμόνες*, p. 245). He has not succeeded to the supreme power of his father Silzibul. Recollecting the statement of Maniach that the realm of Silzibul was divided into four governments, we should expect to find him described as one of four governors. But we now receive different information. We are told that the Turk world (*τὰ ἐκεῖνη πάντα*) is distributed into *eight* parts, and Turxanth is one of the eight chiefs. The two apparently conflicting statements seem perfectly credible, and Menander, fortunately, has put down the reports of the ambassadors without attempting to harmonise them. But the modern critic, who seeks to illustrate mutually the Chinese and the Roman annals, must face the difficulty that in A.D. 568 we find a quadruple, and in 576 an octuple, division of Turkish territory. Mr. Parker has not attempted to solve it, and, so long as he leaves it unexplained, it forms another objection to his theory.

But on the view, which is here put forward, that there were two independent realms and two supreme khans, the apparent inconsistency is easily explained. We should expect, *a priori*, to find both realms organised on the same principle. Just as each had its own Golden Mountain, so each had its own quadruple division. Maniach stated that the empire of Silzibul was divided into four governments, and that was strictly true. But the ambassadors of Tiberius travelled beyond the realm of Silzibul, as we shall see presently, into further Turkey. They were thus able to complete

²⁴ 'In the second year' of Tiberius (Menander, fr. 43, ad init.) Tiberius was created Caesar in the last month of 574. Kulakovski (*K istorii Bospora Kimmeriiskago v kontzie vi vieka*, a paper dealing with the puzzling inscription of Eupaterios; *Viz. Vremennik*, iii. p. 1, sqq., 1896) places the embassy in 575 (p. 12), and the capture of Bosphorus by the Turks in the same year. His paper is important for the history of Bosphorus.

their knowledge of the Turkish world, and to embrace in their view both the northern and the southern realm. In both realms together there were eight chagans, two sovereign, six subordinate; and thus their statement as to the 'eight parts' was true of the Turks as a whole, though not true of the empire of Silzibul taken by itself.

Following the adventures of the embassy of Tiberius, we find that a misconception of Menander's story is generally prevalent, owing to the rooted tendency of historians to establish identifications at any cost. In the narrative of the embassy of 568 we were taken to the Golden Mountain Ektág; in the narrative of 576 we are taken to the Golden Mountain Ektél; and it is at once inferred that Ektél is Ektág, though the inference is quite at variance with the tenor of the narrative.

When Turxanth has completed the obsequies of his father Silzibul, he sends the ambassadors to the Turk khans of further Asia (as we may translate *ἐς τοὺς ἐνδοτέρω ἡγεμόνας Τούρκων*), and to his own kinsman Tardou, who lived in the neighbourhood of Mount Ektél, which means Golden Mountain.⁴ So long as we only knew of one Golden Mountain, it seemed necessary to suppose that the funeral of Silzibul had taken place at a long distance from his residence in Ektág, and that the envoys were sent thither to see a kinsman, who is not described as being the chief khan. This was assuredly a most unsatisfactory explanation. But now that Mr. Parker has established the southern Golden Mountain in Kansuh, there need be no hesitation in seeking Ektél there. Perhaps the most plausible identification of a khan mentioned in Greek sources with a khan named in the Chinese sources is that of Tardou with Tat-t'ou.⁵ This Tat-t'ou was a brother of the great khan Mukan, and must be connected with the southern and not with the northern Turkey. The reigns of Mukan's successors seem to have been marked by civil dissensions. It is possible that Tat-t'ou was not on good terms with his brother, the reigning khan Tapur; ⁶ and that the khans of the northern realm sympathised with Tat-t'ou rather than with his brother. But this is a question which must be left to Chinese scholars.

I must guard myself here against a possible misinterpretation. The Turkish name for both Golden Mountains was the same—*ektag* or *aktag*, white mountain. *Ektél* is a corrupted form, which, for the sake of distinction, it is convenient to retain in this paper. But I cannot regard it as merely a corruption due to a copyist. I have no doubt that the variation *Ἐκτάγ*, *Ἐκτέλ*, corresponding as it does to a real difference, also corresponds to a variety in the

⁴ Menander, p. 247, ed. Müller.

⁵ Parker, 'E. H. R.' xi. 443.

⁶ This is suggested by Mr. Parker, *ibid.* note 12.

(partly oral) sources from which Menander obtained his information on Turkish affairs.

The Chinese annals are more satisfactory in giving definite facts as to the succession and chronology of the southern khans than the Roman historians are for the northern khans. But from Menander we learn who succeeded as chief khan to the throne of Silzibil. His name was Arsilas—a name which certainly suggests a Greek corruption of the lion name of the Seljuks. And he succeeded because he was elder by birth than any other claimant. This is what we must infer from the brief statement: 'Ἀρσίλας δὲ ὄνομα τῷ παλαιτέρῳ μονάρχῳ Τούρκων. Arsilas may have been either a brother of Silzibil or a son older than Turxanth.⁷

The northern and southern realms were intimately connected by geographical continuity, as well as by ties of kinship. At one time they might combine together against a common enemy; at another, when the chief khans were weak, they might each present the appearance of a number of independent peoples. It was by combining together that they succeeded in destroying the nation of the Ephthalites or Abdels.⁸ This achievement is ascribed by Chinese writers to Mukan;⁹ by Greek and Persian sources to Silzibil.¹⁰ The inference is that it was a common enterprise.

III. Leaving Menander, we come to the remarkable Turkish digression in the seventh book of Theophylactus Simocatta. It is interesting to watch the savants of Constantinople gradually extending their knowledge of the peoples of Central Asia. In A.D. 568 they make discoveries about the northern Turks; ten years later their view extends to southern Turkey; and by the end of the century it reaches to Taugast and remote China.

In 598 the khan of the Turks sent an embassy to Maurice—an embassy, as a Russian writer observes,^{10a} of diplomatic politeness to a friendly sovereign. We are not told the khan's name. There is a notice in Tabari which suggests that before 588-9 Arsilas had been succeeded by another, named Shāba or Shāva.¹¹ More important are some records in the Chinese annals which will have to be considered presently. Whatever his name, this khan described

⁷ I cannot follow Mr. Parker's proposal to identify Turxanth with Talopien, son of Mukan (*loc. cit.*). For this implies the identification of Mukan with Silzibil, which Mr. Parker rightly rejected (p. 439).

⁸ Ἀβδαλ in Theophylactus, vii. 7, 8, and in a Syriac document, Land, *Anecdota Syriaca*, iii. 337; Haitāl in Persian sources. Cf. Nöldeke, Tabari, p. 115.

⁹ Parker, *ubi supra*, p. 438, and 442 n. 3.

¹⁰ Menander, p. 226; Theophanes Byz., p. 270 (ed. Müller); Theophylactus, *loc. cit.*; Tabari, p. 159.

^{10a} Kulakovski, *Viz. Vremennik*, *loc. cit.* p. 13.

¹¹ P. 269. The expedition of this khan against Persia is mentioned, and he is described as the chief king of the Turks. It has been proposed to identify Shāva with the Chinese Chao-wou. The Armenian historian, Sebæos, also mentions the expedition, but gives no name to the khan (Russian transl. by Patkanian, p. 73).

himself as the 'Great Lord of seven races, and controller of seven climes of the world.' Theophylactus explains by recounting the Turkish conquest of the Ephthalites, the Avars the true Avars¹², the Ogór and 'the ethnarch of Kolch.' He commits the mistake of attributing to the reigning khan the subjugation of the Ephthalites, which had really been the work of Silzibul and Mukan. As to the date of the reduction of the Ogór, the Chinese annals appear to be silent. It cannot be decided whether Theophylactus falls into a similar error in regard to them and in regard to the conquest of the Avars. He then goes on to mention the rebellion of Turum against the khan, and the battle of Ikar. He seems, from the whole context, to imply that it was on the successful termination of this civil war that the khan sent the embassy to Maurice. But we cannot safely make any inference as to the time that may have elapsed between the end of the war and the embassy. Perhaps the Chinese annals may shed some faint light here; for the civil war mentioned by Theophylactus immediately suggests the disturbances caused by Dalobian.

It will be observed that the effect of the chief conclusions which I have attempted to establish is to place the schism or division of the eastern and western Turks considerably before the date commonly assigned to it. This division is usually placed after the death of Tapur (A.D. 581), nine years after the death of Mukan, five years after the death of Silzibul. We have seen that it must really have taken place before the end of the reign of Mukan at latest; the limit being the year 567. But it is worth while to consider the Chinese account of the schism, which is given in Mr. Parker's book 'A Thousand Years of the Tartars,'¹³ and is very far from being clear or satisfactory.

The great khan Mukan had a son named Dalobian, by an inferior wife. This Dalobian, when his uncle Tapur died in 581, desired to succeed to the supreme position, and was disgusted at the election of his cousin Shaporo. Accordingly, he left the royal residence, and made his way westward to the region of Kuldja. Here he is said to have established a great empire. 'He had Lake Balkash on the west, his dominions included Kashgar to the south and reached to the desert beyond the Altaï in the north.' But it is also stated that he sought the help of, or took refuge with, Tat-t'ou or Tardou, and that Tat-t'ou styled himself 'Bukha Khakan of the west.'¹⁴ And we are thus left in doubt whether, in the joint movement, Dalobian or Tat-t'ou has the better claim to be regarded as the chief khan. However this may have been, Dalobian was presently overthrown, and made a prisoner by Chulagu (or

¹² There seems no reason to decline to identify these Avars with the modern Avars who live in the Lesghian district of the Caucasus.

¹³ P. 231 *sqq.* In 'E. H. R.' xi. 442, n. 5, Mr. Parker seems to suggest another version, that Dalobian set up a rival khanate in A.D. 573 (?).

¹⁴ Parker, *A Thousand Years of the Tartars*, pp. 189, 233.

Chulohou), the brother of Shaporo. The succession in the newly founded western khanate went, with the sanction apparently of Shaporo and Chulohou, to a kinsman named Neri Khakan.

Now, this story has internal marks of incredibility. It rests, of course, on the assumption that there was only one undivided Turkish empire in the reigns of Mukan and Tapur. Dalobian and Tat-t'ou are represented as rebelling, and occupying the western provinces of the empire, and setting up there an independent and sovereign power. The rebellion is suppressed, but we are amazed to find that the provinces are not brought back to their allegiance to Shaporo. On the contrary, Shaporo and his brother assist in the establishment of the very thing which it was the crime of Dalobian and his uncle to have attempted. They found a rival sovereignty in the west. This at least seems to be the implication in the story told by Mr. Parker.

The identification of Turkish names which have passed through Chinese channels with Turkish names which have passed through Greek channels carries little conviction, unless the evidence is cumulative—unless, for example, there occur two groups of names, which are more or less alike, in the same historical connexion. Now, three of the actors in the episode of the revolt of Turum, noticed by Theophylactus, bear names which admit of being compared, without great extravagance, with the names of actors in the episode of the rebellion of Dalobian. The three most important persons in the eastern realm at the time were the king Shaporo, his brother Chulohou, and their nephew T'uli (or Duli).¹⁵ Chulohou succeeded to the throne on Shaporo's death, and T'uli succeeded Chulohou. Nothing seems to be said about T'uli in connexion with the affair of Dalobian, but it is to be presumed that he was on the side of his uncle and sovereign. Now, Theophylactus tells us that the nameless khan of the western Turks, menaced by the revolt of Turum, obtained the help of 'three other great khans,' and he gives their names. They were called Sparzeugûn, Kunaxolân, and Tuldich.¹⁶ It is very tempting to see in the first part of Spar-zeugûn the name of the khan Shaporo or Shapor, and in *zeugûn* the title *zieghu*. This title was borne by subordinate khans of the royal house, and would not have been applied to Shaporo after his accession in A.D. 581; to this point I shall return in a moment. We can also, without much strain on our credulity, see in Tul-dich the name T'uli and the title *djigin*.¹⁷ The approximation of Kunaxolân to Chulagu or Chulohou would, taken by itself, have little probability. But, in the

¹⁵ In the 'E. H. R.' *ubi supra*, Mr. Parker calls him Tulan.

¹⁶ Theophyl. p. 259, ed. de Boor, *Σπαρζευγούν, Κουναξολάν, Τουλδίζ*.

¹⁷ *A Thousand Years of the Tartars*, p. 232. 'It must be noticed that the Chinese, rightly or wrongly, often use such titles as *zieghu* and *djigin* as personal names, e.g. Mukan Djigin, Zieghu Chulagu. Zieghu became a regular title of the khan of the western Turks. Compare also pp. 180, 181.

context—if the connexion of the revolt of Turum with that of Dalobian be entertained—the forms are near enough to represent conceivably the same Turkish name.¹⁸

The story of Theophylactus may now throw light on the Chinese records. The rebel Turum, who attempts to win the supreme power in the western kingdom, is a relation of the reigning khan of the west. The khan is defeated in a battle, and then calls in the help of Sparzeugün and the others. Their united forces defeat Turum at Ikar, and the khan remains undisputed master of his dominions. If we remember that the royal houses of the western and eastern Turks were closely related, we may venture to take Turum as the name of the person whom the Chinese sources designate by the title Dalobian.¹⁹ On this view, the rebellion of Dalobian would have a double complexion: at once a quarrel with the eastern khan and an attempt to usurp the throne of the western khan.

Now, there is another point which it is important to observe. It appears that Dalobian quarrelled and left the court before his uncle Tapur's death and his cousin Shaporo's succession. Mr. Parker says: 'In 581 Talopien openly broke with him [Tapur] and sought help from his uncle Tat-t'ou.' This circumstance would illustrate the readiness of Shaporo to help the western khan against Dalobian. Shaporo, not yet khan, would have been ready to purchase a guarantee from the khan of the west to support his claims to the throne, by lending help against Dalobian, his rival—more ready than if he had actually gained the coveted prize. And if the intervention of Shaporo took place before Tapur's death, the title *zieghu*, which we may venture to see in *zeugün*, would be thereby explained.²⁰

If this combination is right—the very nature of our sources drives us to combinations—Theophylactus has clearly conceived the battle of Ikar as having been fought fifteen years or so later than its true date: just in the same way as he has postdated the subjugation of the Ephthalites.

¹⁸ *Κουλαζολάν* (var. -*δ*) may be a corruption of *Κουλαζολάν* by a familiar kind of dissimilation. I do not attempt to explain -*σολάν*. In his *Hün-Avar szó-es nevlejtstrom*, appended to his *A magyarok eredete*, Vámbéry explains (p. 421) this name as equivalent to *quartermaster*, and Tuldich as *mourner*. He offers explanations also of the other proper names in Menander and Theophylactus. I cannot criticise from the Turkish side; but they sound completely unconvincing.

¹⁹ Dalobian or talopien was a title; Parker, *A Thousand Years of the Tartars*, p. 180. In the same way the true name of Shaporo was Shetu.

²⁰ In any case, there is little difficulty about the use of this title. For, supposing Shaporo to have already succeeded Tapur at the time when he was appealed to for help by the khan of the west, the sources or informants of Theophylactus were most likely to transfer to the supreme khan of the east a title which soon afterwards came to be commonly used by the supreme khan of the west.

IV. For the sake of clearness I may briefly state the main points of this paper :—

(1) The division of the north-western from the south-eastern Turks took place at least fourteen or fifteen years earlier than is assumed in Chinese histories. It cannot have taken place later than 567, and it probably took place earlier (perhaps during the reign of Tumen or at the time of the accession of Mukan in 558).

(2) The mountains Ektág and Ektél in Menander are to be distinguished. Ektág is to be sought in the Altai, and is the residence of the north-western khan; Ektél is in the province of Kansuh, and is the residence of the south-western khan.

(3) It is suggested that Theophylactus has postdated—or, more strictly, implied too late a date for; he does not commit himself to a distinct note of time—the episode of Turum, and that this episode may be brought into relation with the Chinese notices of the movement of Dalobian in 581. This suggestion is modestly submitted to the consideration of Chinese scholars, as I am fully conscious of the hazards which attend such reconstruction when one is ignorant of Chinese; and if it is not acceptable, it may possibly help them to discover something better. The solution of questions like these, if indeed they are capable of a final solution, can only be reached by co-operation between Chinese students and those who have spent some time over the works of the Greek historians.

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