

NAIDHEACHDAN MU SHÌDHICHEAN AS LOCH ABAR

Calum I. MacGhilleEathain

An dà shìdhiche mu dheireadh a chaidh fhaicinn anns an dùthaich seo 's ann an Clianaig am Bràigh Loch Abar a chaidh am faicinn.

Ailean MacDhomhnaill, 13/1/1951

'S ann an Clianaig a chunnaic iad an dà shìdhiche mu dheireadh a chaidh fhaicinn an Loch Abar. 'S e fear Mac Coinnich a chunnaic iad. 'S e mac do Mhac Coinnich a bha 'ga innseadh dhomh-sa. 'S ann anns na cruic a tha na sìdhichean. Bidh iad ann gu deireadh an t-saoghail.

Ailean MacDhomhnaill, 22/2/1951

BOIREANNACH CAOL RUADH

Bha boireannach ann a seo agus bha i fuathasach fialaidh. 'S iomadh neach a thàinig a dh' iarraidh iasad oirre, gu sòn-ruichte iasad mine. Thàinig boireannach caol, ruadh a staigh a' latha a bha seo agus i gu math coibhneil, bàidheil agus dh' iarr i gràinnean mine oirre.

"Ach cuiridh mi air ais a' mhin," thuirt i, "dar a théid Muileann na h-Anaid 'na theine. Gheibh sinn an toradh an uair sin," thuirt i.

Fhuair i a' mhin. Agus thàinig i air ais leatha latha na dhà agus labhair i na briathran:

"Chaidh a' muileann 'na theine agus shin agat a' mhin agat," thuirt i. "Agus na leig aon neach," thuirt i, "d'an chiste mhine agat agus chan fhaic thu grunn na ciste a feasd. Bidh min daonnan agat 's a' chistidh."

'S ann mar seo a bha. Thachair dh' an bhoireannach a bhith a mach latha. Na bu dé thug air a' nigheann air neo air boireannach cile a dhol d'an chistidh a thoirt deanntan mine as air son rud air chor cigin agus cha robh nì air thoiseach oirre ach cac eich. Cha robh aice ach seo a theilgeil a mach.

FAIRY STORIES FROM LOCHABER

Calum I. Maclean *

The two fairies last seen in this country were seen at Clianaig in Brae Lochaber.

Allan MacDonell, 13/1/1951

It was at Clianaig they saw the last two fairies that were seen in Lochaber. It was a man named MacKenzie who saw them. It was a son of this MacKenzie who told me. The fairies are wont to be in the hillocks (F721.2).¹ They will be there till the end of the world.

Allan MacDonell, 22/2/1951

A THIN, RED-HAIRED WOMAN

There was a woman in this district and she was very hospitable. Many came to her to ask for a loan, especially a loan of meal. A thin, red-haired woman came in this day and she was rather kind and friendly and she asked her for a handful of meal (F391.2).

"I shall return the meal," said she, "when the Mill of Annat goes on fire (F369.1). We shall get the produce then," said she.

She got the meal. And she came back with it a couple of days later and she spoke the following words:

"The mill went on fire and there is your meal," said she. "And let no one else," said she, "into your meal-chest and you will not see the bottom of the chest ever (F335.1). You will always have meal in the chest."

It did so happen. The woman chanced to be away from home one day. Whatever it was that caused the daughter or some other woman to go to the meal-chest to take out a handful of meal for some purpose or other, she found nothing before her there but horse-droppings (F348.0.1).² There was nothing

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Agus bha a' chiste mhine aice mar a bha i roimhe, cho tric falamh is a bha i làn.

Iain MacDhomhnaill, 21/1/1951

FEAR A CHUNNTAIS NA SÌDHICHEAN

Bha an sluagh anns an dùthaich seo air an cuideachadh gu math tric leis na sìdhichean. Tha àite anns an dùthaich seo ris an abair iad an Ràth, thall am Brac-leitir. Agus bha duine a' fuireach ann ris an abradh iad Ailean Mór an Ràth agus iomadh duine air thoiseach air an am aig Ailean Mór an Ràth. Agus bha fear a' dol seachad aig Gearrlochaidh, dìreach mu choinncamh an Ràth: tha iad glé theann air a chéile ach gu bheil an abhainn a' ruith sìos eatorra, Abhainn Spèan. Bha oidhche bhriagha ghealach ann agus gu dé b' iongnadh leis ach an t-àite làn sìdhichean a' ruith air ais 's air adhart ag obair air an arbhar. Agus 's ann dar a rachadh càch mu thàmh air an oidhche, 's ann a bha à-san a' tighinn a mach a dh' obair. Agus thuirt e ris fhéi':

“Chuala mi iomradh riamh air nan cunntadh tu na sìdhichean nach fhaiceadh tu tuillidh iad. Nach fhiach mi ri sin a dhèanadh,” thuirt e ris fhéi'.

Shuidh e agus bha e 'gan cunntas. Agus b'e sin an obair. Bha iad cho colta' ri chéile a chuile h-aon dhiubh a' ruith air ais 's air adhart. Is thuirt e:

“Is iomadh cunntas a rinn mi riamh air meanbhchruiddh 's air crodh, air spréidh, agus an iomadh àite ach *bheat* seo na thachair riamh orm.”

Chum e air cunntas gus an d' thàinig a dh' ionnsaigh ciad gu leth.

“Ma tà, chan 'eil mi ro chinnteach a bheil iad agam uile, ach 's e an t-aon rud a chuala mi, nam bitheadh iad air an cunntas ceart, nach bitheadh iad ri fhaicinn tuillidh.”

Agus chum e air a thuras. Dar a thàinig a' sluagh a mach 's a' mhaduinn, b' iongnadh leotha a chuile sguab cho seasgair tioram air a chur air dòigh agus air a thughadh. Agus thug iad taing seachad: na bu có a rinn e, gur h-iad an sgioba a bha tapaidh. Agus cha deach na sìdhichean fhaicinn tuillidh. Agus feumaidh, a' fear a chunnt iad, gun robh iad air an cunntas ceart. Mar a tha a' facal ag ràdha, “Ma chunntas e a dh' ionnsaigh a h-aon iad, chan fhaic thu a h-aon dhiubh tuillidh.”

Iain MacDhomhnaill, 18/2/1951

she could do except throw this out. And her meal-chest was as it had been before, as often empty as it was full.

John Macdonald, 21/1/1951

A MAN WHO COUNTED THE FAIRIES

The folk in this country were often helped by the fairies (F346). There is a place in this district which they call the Ràth, over in Brackletter. And there was a man living there whom they called Big Allan of the Ràth, and many other people lived there before the time of Big Allan of the Ràth. And a certain man was passing by Gearrochy, over opposite the Ràth; the two places are very close to one another except that the river runs down between them, the Spean river. It was a fine, moonlit night, and to his amazement the place was full of fairies who ran hither and thither as they harvested the corn (F455.6.8.1). And it was when other people went to rest at night that they came out to work (F348.8). And he said to himself:

“I have always heard it said that, if you counted the fairies (F381), you would not see them again. Should I not try to do that?” said he to himself.

He sat down and counted them. And that was some job. They were all so alike running to and fro. And he said:

“I have made many reckonings of sheep and of cattle, of herds, and I did so in many places but this has surpassed anything that I have ever come across.”

He continued counting until he came to a hundred and fifty.

“Indeed, I am not sure that I have them all, but the one thing I did hear is that, if they were counted properly, they would not be seen again.”

And he continued on his journey. When the folk came out in the morning, they were amazed to find every sheaf safe and dry, stacked and thatched. And they expressed their thanks: whoever did it, it was done by an agile team. And the fairies were not seen again. And it must have been that the person who counted them did count them properly. As the saying has it, “If he counts them to the exact figure, you will not see one of them again.”

John Macdonald, 18/2/1951

CUNNTAS NAN SÌDHICHEAN

'S e 'n dòigh a bh' aca, chuala mi, air cunntas nan sìdhichean—agus chan 'eil e fuathasach furasda a dhèanadh 'n uair a tha iad cho dlùth ris na meanbhchuileagan a' leum feadh nan cnoc—tha iad ag ràitinn:

A h-aon, a dhà, a trì, a ceithir, a còig;
A dhà, a ceithir, a sia, a h-ochd, a deich;
Trì, sia, a naoi, dhà dhiag, còig diag;
Ceithir, ochd, dhà dhiag, sia diag, fichead;
Còig, deich, còig diag, fichead, còig air fhichead;
Sia, a dhà dhiag, a h-ochd, ceithir air fhichead,
deich air fhichead;
Seachd, ceithir diag, a h-aon air fhichead, ochd air fhichead,
còig diag air fhichead;
Ochd, sia diag, ceithir air fhichead, dhà dhiag air fhichead,
dà fhichead;
Naoi, ochd diag, seachd air fhichead, sia diag air fhichead,
dà fhichead is a còig;
Deich, fichead, deich air fhichead, dà fhichead, leth-chiad;
A h-aon diag, dhà air fhichead, trì diag air fhichead, dà
fhichead is a ceithir, leth-chiad is a còig;
A dhà dhiag, ceithir air fhichead, sia diag air fhichead, dà
fhichead is a h-ochd, trì fichead.

Agus 's ann mar sin a bha iad 'gan cunntas. Agus nan cunntaiseadh iad gun mhearachd—theag' gun d' runn mise mearachd—ach nan cunntaiseadh iad gun mhearachd, chan fhaiceadh iad sìdhiche tuillidh.

Iain MacDhomhnaill, 22/2/1951

“OBAIR, OBAIR, FHEARCHAIR!”³

Bha fear ann ris an abradh iad Fearchar agus gu math tric bha bruaillean glé mhór air a chur air agus dragh le sìdhichean a bhiodh a' tighinn thar (*sic*) an robh e agus iad ag iarraidh obair, obair, “Thoir dhuinn obair.”

“Falbh,” thuir⁴ e riutha a' latha a bha seo, “agus tiormaichibh an loch a tha gu h-àrd a sin.”

“Nì sinn sin.”

Dh' fhalbh iad. Agus an ath-latha, dar a chaidh e an àirde, bha an loch tioram. Thàinig iad a rithist thar an robh e feasgar. Thug e dhaibh obair air chor eigin eile agus rinn iad sin. Agus ghabh e iongantais cho allamh agus a chuir iad crìoch air an obair a bh' ann. Cha chreid mise nach ann a' spìonadh

COUNTING THE FAIRIES

This, I have heard, was the way they counted the fairies—and that is not easy to do when they leap about the hillocks as thick as the midges—they say:

One, two, three, four, five (Z71.3) (D1273.1.2.1.);

Two, four, six, eight, ten;

Three, six, nine, twelve, fifteen;

Four, eight, twelve, sixteen, twenty;

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five;

Six, twelve, eighteen, twenty-four, thirty;

Seven, fourteen, twenty-one, twenty-eight, thirty-five;

Eight, sixteen, twenty-four, thirty-two, forty;

Nine, eighteen, twenty-seven, thirty-six, forty-five;

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty;

Eleven, twenty-two, thirty-three, forty-four, fifty-five;

Twelve, twenty-four, thirty-six, forty-eight, sixty.

And it was in that way they counted them. And if they counted without a mistake—perhaps I have made a mistake—but if they counted without a mistake, they would not see a fairy again (F381).

John Macdonald, 22/2/1951

“WORK, WORK, FARQUHAR!”³

There was a man they called Farquhar and very often he was sorely troubled and vexed by fairies who came to him asking for work, work, “Give us work.”

“Go,” said he to them this day, “and empty the loch (H1097.1) that is up yonder.”

“We will do that.”

Away they went. And the following day, when he went up, the loch was dry. They came to him again in the evening. He gave them some other work and that they did. And he wondered how quickly they performed that task (H1090). I rather think that they were put to pluck the heather from the

fraoich a bha iad bharr a' mhonaidh. Agus tha a' monadh gorm gus an latha an diugh. Cha d' fhàs fraoch riamh air. Agus a sin:

“Tha iad a' cur dragh glé mhór orm,” thuirt e ris a' bhean. “Agus bidh iad a màireach cho dona is a bha iad riamh, a' cur dragh orm ag iarraidh obair.” “Had!” thuirt a' bhean, “nach toir thu orra sìoman a dhèanadh de'n ghaineamhaich a tha a sìos air a' chladach. Dh' fhairtlich e air an Donas fhéin sìoman a dhèanadh do'n ghaineamhaich, ach dh' iarr e moll agus gun dèanadh e e. Chan fhaigheadh e moll agus mar sin dh' fhairtlich air. Abair sin riutha.”

Thàinig iad an ath-fheasgar a dh' iarraidh obair.

“Falbh a sìos agus dèanaibh sìoman de'n ghaineamhaich a tha shìos air a' chladach.”

Dh' fhalbh iad. Thug iad treis ag obair sin ach cha robh a' chùis a' dol leotha. Thill iad air ais. Thuirt iad gun a dh' fhairtlich sin orra a dhèanadh ach na faigheadh iad innear eich, mar a their iad ann am facal ciùin, laghach, sgàinteach each. Agus mar sin cha d' fhuair.

“Chan fhaigh sibh sin. Agus dèanaibh sìoman dheth a réir an ordugh a fhuair sibh. Agus mar a dèan, na faiceam tuillidh an rathad seo sibh.”

Agus dh' fhairtlich sin orra agus fhuair am bodach cuidhte 's na sìdhichean. Agus bha Fearchar glé thoilichte. Mar a thuirt mi ruibh, cha d' fhàs fraoch riamh air a' bheinn an deadhaidh na sìdhichean a tarrainn. Agus 's e té dhiubh sin Beinn Dóbhrain. Tha i gorm gus an latha an diugh. Agus 's iomadh facal a thuirt Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir m'a déidhinn, ma dhéidhinn Beinn Dóbhrain:

“S i bu bhòidhche liom—
Monadh fada réidh,
Coille a faighte féidh,
'S soileireach an treud
Bhios an còmhnuidh ann.”

Iain MacDhomhnaill, 18/2/1951

CAILLEACH A THACHAIR RI SEALGAIREAN

Dh' fhalbh dà òganach turas agus iad air fonn anabharrach math agus iad ag ràdha riutha fhéin, “Thogainn fonn air lorg an fhéidh.” Ach dar a thàinig a' feasgar, thàinig cur is cathadh a bha fuathasach. Agus 's e coltas call a bh' ann. Agus bha iad shuas ann an Coire Chlamhraidh is an cur a' tighinn gu trom

moor. And the moor is green to this day. No heather grew on it ever since. And then—

“They are troubling me very much,” said he to his wife. “And to-morrow they will be as bad as ever, troubling me by asking for work.”

“Tut!” said the wife (J155.4), “why do you not ask them to make a rope out of the sand (H1021.1) that is down on the shore? The Evil One himself failed (K211) to make a rope of the sand, but he asked for chaff⁵ in order to make it. He could not get chaff and so failed. Tell them that.”

The following evening they came to ask for work.

“Go down and make a rope of the sand that is down on the shore.”

Away they went. They were engaged in that work for some time but did not succeed. They came back. They said they had failed but if only they got horse-dung, as they say—to use a gentle, polite word—the *sgàinteach* of horses. And that they did not get.

“You will not get that. And make a rope of it according to the directions you have been given. And if you do not, do not let me see you around here any more.”

And they failed to perform that task and the old man got rid of the fairies (F381.11). And Farquhar was very pleased. As I have told you, no heather ever grew on the mountain when the fairies had cut it. And one of these mountains is Ben Dorain. It is green to this very day. And many words has Duncan Bàn MacIntyre said about it, about Ben Dorain:

“To me it is most beautiful:
The wide, smooth hill,
A forest wherein deer are found.
Bright is the throng
That is wont to be there.”

John Macdonald, 18/2/1951

A HAG WHO MET HUNTERS

Two youths went away one time and they were in high spirits and said to themselves, “I’d sing merrily on the track of the deer.” But when evening fell, they were caught in a terrible blizzard. And it seemed that they would perish. And they were up in Coire Chlamhraidh⁶ and the snowfall was envelop-

orra agus coltas call. Bha iad a' dol a staigh do'n a chuile h-àite a bha iad a' smaointinn a faigheadh iad fasnadh ach cha robh fasnadh ann. Thàinig a seo fialtas glé bheag agus beilghe air an tìde. Chunnaic iad solust glé bheag air thoiseach orra is rinn iad dìreach air an t-solust. Agus chunnaic iad air gròbadh a bh' air an dorust cailleach cho grànda is a chunnaic iad riamh 'na suidhe taobh an teine agus ceirtle shnàth aice agus i a' cur snaidhmeannan air an t-snàth thall 's a bhos.

“Saoil an téid sinn a staigh?” thuirt an darna fear ris an fhear eile. “Théid, o'n is e an call a bhios ann. Grànda is mar a tha i, théid sinn a staigh.”

Dar a chaidh iad dlùth air an dorust, thuirt a' chailleach:

“Thigibh a staigh, 'illean. Bha dùil agam ruibh fad an fheasgair.”

Chaidh iad a staigh agus fhuair iad biadh bhuaipe agus chuir i a chadal iad. Cha robh iad a' faotainn fois uamhasach math ach a' cuimhneachadh air gnùis na cailliche. Dh' éirich iad 's a' mhaduinn agus fhuair iad am biadh maduinne bhuaipe. Agus dh' fhalbh iad.

“Innsidh mi dé an turas a ghabhas sibh,” thuirt a' chaill-each. “Gabhaidh sibh a mach am Bealach Odhar agus gheibh sibh ann a sin lorg an dóbhrain. Agus leanaidh sibh an dóbhran agus an ruig sibh am beul-àtha, agus theag' gun dèan e feum dhuibh.”

'S ann mar seo a bha. Ràinig iad am Bealach Odhar is fhuair iad lorg an dóbhrain. Agus bha e a' falbh gu math athaiseach leis cho domhainn is a bha a' sneachda. Dhlùthaich iad air dar a bha e a' dol 'un an aisidh. Agus b'e sin an t-aiseadh a bha cunnartach, am beul-àtha seo a dhol seachad air leis an tuil a bh' ann. Chaidh e a nunn do'n uisge, an dóbhran. Is dar a chaidh, thàinig, sìth is fialtas air an uisge. Agus dh' fhalbh an t-uisge gu cunbhalach réidh is fhuair iad seachad gun dragh. Chaidh iad seachad crioman agus chunnaic iad féidh gu h-àrd air an t-sliabh. B'e seo am miann, gun toireadh iad fiadh dhachaidh. Chaidh iad an àirde agus dh' fhiach iad air an fhiadh bu bhriagha a bha 'na measg agus thuit e. Chaidh iad an àirde. Is 'n uair a chaidh iad an àirde thar an robh e, cha robh aca ach an t-seiche ann a sin is e air fheannadh cho math is a chunnaic iad riamh. Is cha robh sgial air a' chlosach.

“O, ma tà, cha téid sinn na's fhaide as deadhaidh nam fiadh. Agus nì sinn air an taigh, mar a dh' iarr a' chailleach.”

Agus 's ann mar sin a bha. Rinn iad air an taigh. Agus rinn

ing them rapidly and they were in danger of death. They went into every cranny in which they thought they would find shelter but there was no shelter. Then there came a very slight calm and lull in the storm. They saw a very dim light before them and they made straight for the light. And through the door, which was slightly ajar, they saw a hag (F234.2.1) as ugly as they had ever seen sitting by the fire holding a ball of wool (D1184.1) and knotting the thread here and there.

“Do you think we ought to go in?” said the one to the other. “We will, otherwise we shall be lost. Ugly as she is, we will go in.”

When they approached the door, the hag said:

“Come in, lads. I have been expecting you all evening.”

They went in and received food from her and she put them to sleep. They were not able to rest very well because they thought of the hag’s appearance. They arose in the morning and got their breakfast from her. And they went away.

“I shall tell you the route you will take (F347),” said the hag. You will go out through the Bealach Odhar and there you will find the track of the otter (F240). And you will follow the otter until you reach the ford, and perhaps that will serve you well.”

That is what happened. They reached the Bealach Odhar and they found the track of the otter. And it was moving very slowly because of the depth of the snow. They came closer to it as it approached the crossing. And that was the crossing that was really dangerous—the fording of this stream owing to the heavy spate. The otter went into the water. And when it went in, the water became calm and placid. And the water flowed on evenly and smoothly (D2141.0.8.1) and they got across without trouble. Then went on a little way and they saw deer above them on the moor. It was their wish to bring a deer home. They went up and aimed at the finest deer amongst them and it fell. Up they went. And when they went up to the place where it was, there was nothing before them there but the hide and it had been skinned as cleanly as they had ever seen. And there was no trace of the carcass (Q552.3.4).

“Oh, now that this is the case, we will go no farther in pursuit of the deer. And we will set off for home, as the hag desired.”

And that was what they did. They made straight for home.

an athair sogan glé mhór riutha 'n uair a chunnaic e iad a' tighinn.

“Is mi tha toilichte gun d' thàine sibh,” thuirt e. “Bha mi an dùil gun robh sibh air 'ur call, an oidhche stoirmeil a bh' ann.”

Dh' innis iad a chuile car dha, mar a chuir iad dhiubh is mar a bha a' chailleach agus an dóbhran is a' fiadh.

“Na cuireadh a cùram na bruaillean oirbh nach d' fhuair sibh a' fiadh. 'S e a bha a' cur a' chaimir inntinn orm nach robh sibh a' tighinn dachaidh. Agus biodh am fiadh a' dol an rathad a thoilicheas e.”

Agus thuirt e:

“'S e a' chailleach a bha seo a fhuair a' chlosach. Na bheannaich sì'-se am biadh 'n uair a fhuair sibh bho'n chaillich e?”

“O, cha do bheannaich!”

“S ann mar sin a tha na sìdhichean air am beathachadh le teachd-an-tìr, am biadh nach téid a bheannachadh 's iad a tha a' faotainn a thoradh. Agus 's ann mar sin a bha a' chailleach; 's i fhuair a' chlosach. Agus sìth do'n tì a dh' fhalbhas! Chan e a dh' fhoghnadh. Gabhadh e an rathad. Tha mi toilichte gun d' thàine sibh péin dhachaidh agus gun d' fhuair sibh sàbhailte cuidhte 's a' chailleach.”

Iain MacDhomhnaill, 18/2/1951

NOTES

- ¹ Motif-numbers according to Stith Thompson (1955-8).
- ² The same motif occurs in a story from Benbecula. See Maclean 1957:46.
- ³ For a shorter variant of this story (Aa.-Th. 1174) see Campbell 1900:96-7. For other references to the motif H1021; 1 see Bolte-Polivka; 2 (1915): 513; 3 (1918:16). In the archives of the School of Scottish Studies there are three other variants, from Acharacle, Benbecula and Raasay.
- ⁴ In the main I have adhered to normal spelling and have not indicated the change of medial and final *c* to *chc* nor marked glide vowels as in e.g. *cunabhalach* nor the intrusive *s* as in e.g. *thuirst*. The change of final *s* to *st* I have indicated, e.g. *solust*, *dorust*. All these features are fairly regular in the narrators' dialect. It will be noted too that there are rare words in the text, e.g. *aiseadh*, *beilghe*, *caimir inntinn*, *fialtas*, *gròbadh*, *sgàinteach*.
- ⁵ This is another motif, H1021.2.
- ⁶ Below and to the east of Stob Choire Chlaurigh (Ordnance Survey spelling) in the Ben Nevis range.
- ⁷ The informants are (a) the late Allan MacDonell, a native of Bunroy, Brae Lochaber. He died (aged 86) in January 1954. (b) John Macdonald, Aonachan (Highbridge), Lochaber. John Macdonald was born

And their father was greatly delighted when he saw them coming.

"I am indeed pleased that you have come," said he. "I had thought that you were lost because the night was so stormy."

They told him all that happened, what they themselves did and about the hag, the otter and the deer.

"Let it neither vex nor worry you that you did not get the deer. What was causing me anxiety was that you yourselves did not arrive home. And let the deer go the way it chooses."

And he said:

"It was the hag who got the carcass. Did you ask for a blessing of food (F382.3) when you received it from the hag?"

"Oh, we did not."

"That is the way the fairies acquire the livelihood that sustains them; it is they who get the substance of the food that is not blessed. And so it was with the hag; it was she who got the carcass. And peace be with the being that is gone! That alone would not be enough. Let it go its way. I am glad that you yourselves have come home and that you got out of the clutches of the hag."

John Macdonald,⁷ 18/2/1951

at Aonachan on 15th October 1876. He was a railwayman from the age of 13 to 65. He is at present employed as a road-mender by the Inverness-shire County Council. Over 600 *Sagen* and other material were recorded from this man. He still (22/10/1959) has more to record.

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