

THE SPIRIT POND INSCRIPTION STONE RHYME AND REASON

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PART TWO: REASON

In this second part of The Spirit Pond Inscription Stone: Rhyme and Reason, we turn our attention to a linguistic analysis of Stone #3 based on the original transcription of 10 lines on side #1 and 6 lines on side #2 as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

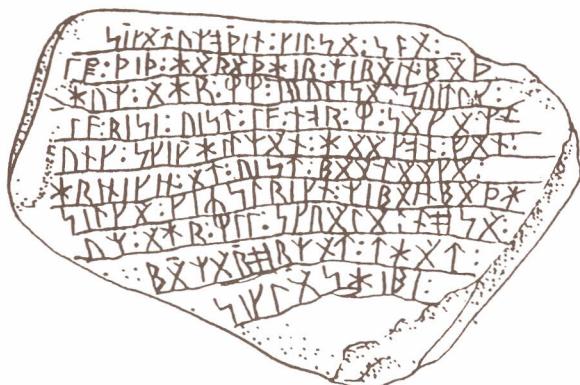


Fig. 1. Side 1; 10 lines.

1. SIKATUMOÐIN: KILSA: SLJA:
sé gat um Oðin gel sá sjá
2. 17 ÞIP: HALAÐHIR: MIBAINBAÐ
sjautan ded hæla þeir mé(r) baen baðhum
3. HUM: AHR: 10/10: (UU?) LISA SVTLG:
ahr tuttugu . . . lesa sveit l(a)g
4. 12: RISI: VIST: 12: NOR: 10: SAJAMLJ
tólf risi vest tólf nor tio saga (u)m
5. UNK: SKIKHILMAN: HAAKON: FAN:
ljung skeg(g)heilman(n) Haakon fan(n)
6. HRINIKIN: AT: VIST: BAA: LAAGA
hringin(n) at vest paa laaga
7. SILKA: KIYSLRIKN: MIBAINBAD
selja giyсл rek(i)n mé(r) baen baðhum
8. HUM: AHR 10/1/1 SKUALALJOISA:
ahr tólf skval á ljoisa
9. BAMAROIUMAT: THAT
pa mar oi úmat óá at
10. SIKLASHIPI
sigla shipi

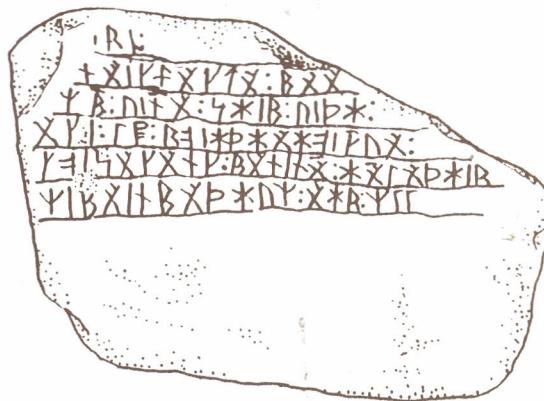


Fig. 2. Side 2; 6 lines.

1. RI:
ri
2. NAIKJAKTA:BAA
ná eggja akta pá
3. MB: VINA: SHIP: VIDH:
umb vin(n)a ship viðh
4. AKI: 17 ROIHDHAHOIKUA:
aegi sjautján rauðhahög(g)va
5. GOISAGANG BANINA HALADIR
gósa gang banina hæla ðeir
6. MIBAINBADHUM: AHR M/11
mé(r) baen baðhum ahr M/1/1

Studies of the Spirit Pond Inscriptions Stones have been made by Buchanan (1972, 1992), Haugen (1974), Gordon (1974), Mongé and Landsverk (1974), Syversen (1979), Wahlgren (1982), Nielsen (1988, 1992), Chapman (1992).

The 1992 papers of Buchanan, Chapman and Nielsen were published in *The Occasional Papers of the Epigraphic Society (ESOP)* (Vol. 21).

I have not included a summary of Dr. Haugen's (1974) evaluation, because I hope that this paper as a whole addresses his doubts by presenting an interpretation that demonstrates a recognizable language in a coherent context with a reasonable message.

I am not qualified to evaluate the theories of Mongé and Landsverk, but nothing in the text suggests that the author is a 12th century cleric, and it seems very un-

likely that this is the work of Bishop Eirik Gnupsson. Certainly ciphers, magic and cryptography were part of the Old Norse repertoire. I refer the reader to the works of Mongé and Landsverk, Syversen, Gordon and Hahn for in-depth discussion of the subject.

Wahlgren's distainful treatment of the stone and its author adds nothing to reasonable consideration of the question and his comments will not be reviewed.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

To establish a foundation for this investigation, I have used the grammar and vocabulary of Classical Old West Norse (Old Icelandic) as it was written in the 12th and 13th centuries in Iceland. It is the textbook language for students of Old Norse and available for study. My fluency falls far short of detecting dialectal variations of later medieval developments so that deviations from the norm are speculation and interpolation on my part. The general grammatical structure and vocabulary reflects a 12th – 14th century west Scandinavian source for the language of the inscription.

Double dots resembling a colon indicate word divisions, but are not necessary between all words. Runemasters can be very arbitrary in their use of punctuation and word division. Double consonants are rarely shown as such in runic inscriptions, while one letter may represent two, particularly if one word ends with the first letter of the next word. Nielsen discusses the use of the “helping” *h* in great detail in his work on the Kensington Stone published in ESOP.

WORD ORDER AND SYNTAX.

Old Norse, an inflected language, follows a different pattern than analytical English (Subject—Verb—Object), but nonetheless strict patterns have developed. For example, split infinitives are not only common, but convention demands that the parts of verbs be separated as much as possible (e.g. I will to Vinland next summer go). Syntax, too, is governed by inflection, and the subtle meanings of case usage are far more complex than our Subject—Object—Indirect Object, leading to such usages as the instrumental dative such as *mér baen baðum* which defies direct translation. “By me as the instrument of making something happen” is not easily rendered in one English word, and the author’s strong voice is lost without it. This is the sort of thing that confounds all translators. Something is lost!

Poetry word order is driven by alliteration, rhyme and beat, and can be daunting to fathom. The Spirit Pond Inscription Stone follows poetic dictates with only an echo of prose word order and syntax.

SPELLING.

There is surprising consistency in the spelling. There was no correct spelling until after Gutenberg, so each scribe concocted his own system of setting sounds on paper, part phonetic and part impatience. I still write this way, and without spell check and our editor you’d be laughing (or crying) over my treatment of English.

The standard later futhorc as we have here contains the vowels *O,A,I,U*. Old Norse distinguished many more discrete sounds now represented in normalized Old Norse as *a, á, au, æ, e, é, ei, i, ó, ö, ou, u, ú, y, ý*. Imagine the creative choices a rune master had with only four letters available to represent all these sounds and no spelling rules. Our author displays his own inventiveness in several instances. His *AA* answers to normalized *á*; *OI* answers to normalized *ó* or *ö*, *IY* to *i*.

Much of our knowledge of pronunciation is derived from rhymes in old poetry. In the Spirit Pond inscription we can detect rhymes without knowing their exact sound (*róda-hóggva, rauðr-hauggva, röda-höggya*). *I* and *E*, *A* and *Æ* were used indiscriminately in both vellum manuscripts and runestones.

The symbol  transliterated as *oo* or *oi* represents *ö*. This form is unique to our runemaster. The  (*lj* or *j*) was considered copied from the Kensington Stone. It clearly represents unvoiced *j* (*y*), although the early language probably sounded the liquid *l*. I believe that the Spirit Pond runemaster knew his runes quite well and the anomalies were intentional.

The vexing stung *A*  is known only on the Kensington Stone, and after 1985 on the Narragansett Stone. Professor Haugen considered it a sure sign of forgery since it is otherwise unknown. This argument is tidy; if we assume the inscription to be a random scattering of letters without meaning, the mystery is solved. If we find an acceptable Old Norse context and meaning, the conundrum becomes acute. To my ear, the poetic meter is there, the alliteration, the beat, the rhymes. The words have meaning, often several meanings as demonstrated by the various translations offered. Is this to be dismissed because of one letter or should we instead accept that letter as a clue to a unique “Vinlandic” usage?

Our writer has selected several ways of rendering the letter *j*: first *lj* = *j* to represent a more liquid sound, *g* = *j* may be taken for a voiced letter or harder sound, and *kv* = *kj* with an unknown sound. In the vellums, *j* is usually written as an *i*, probably imitating the Latin.

The following is a list of the runic letters in Latin form transposed into normalized Old Norse.

I = i, í, e, é, ie, ei; K = k, g, j; B = b, p; P = p, d; LJ = j; KV = kj; SH = sk.

Line by line analysis is based on the 16 lines as they appear on the stone, and not according to the poetic transcription shown in Part I-Rhyme.

Line 1:

SIKATUM OÐIN:
sé *gat* um Oðin:

sé imperative of *sjá*: v. “to see.”

sé *um*—With the preposition *um*, “on, about, concerning,” *sjá* takes on the meaning of “take care of, look after.” For example: *Hoskuldr sá um med honum*, Hoskuld looked after him.

gat: f.ACC. “heed, attention” or 1st and 3rd person pres. ind. of *geta*, “to get, to do, to be able.” *Geta* is parallel to the English “get” in much of its usage.

Hence: Take care and pay heed (to this) Odin.

KILSA: SLJA
gel sá sjá

gel: 3rd pers. sing. pres. ind. of *gala*, metaph. “to chant, to sing (a spell).”

gel(l): 3rd pers. sing. pres. ind. of *gjalla*, of birds “to scream, shriek,” of men “to cry out, to shout.” These two words must be from the same root; the cries of birds were treated as omens and it is possible that early chanted spells were derived from bird cries.

sá: 1st pers. sing. pret. ind. of *sjá*, “he saw”

sá: pron., “this, that”

sjá: inf. or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *sjá*, “they see”

sjá: pron. “this, that”

Hence: (Odin) saw and cried out see this!

(Odin) cried out this: see!

Both readings or a mix are possible. The historic present is common in Old Norse and often mixed with the past tense (preterite) and is common throughout the inscription.

Line 2:

SJAUTJÁN = 17:
seventeen (the number)

PIP
ðeð

ðeð. All investigators agree that this represents some form of *dauði*, m. “dead” or *dauðr*, adj., “dead.” Nielsen presents evidence of *TH* used for *D* in medieval manuscripts. *Dauðr* adj. was originally a substantive. Adjectives frequently slip across boundaries and act like

nouns. Thus “dead” becomes the “dead thing.” *Deyða* is the verb “to kill or put to death,” from *deyja*, “to die.”

HALAÐHIR

haelaðr or hæla þeir

haelaðr: p.p. *haela*, “praised, flattered” with dative, “gloried.”

haela þeir: imper. & 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *haela*, “praise.” *þeir*: nom. 3rd pers. pl. pron. “they” or *þér*, NOM. 2nd pers. pl. pron., “you (all)” or *þér* DAT. 2nd pers. sing. pron., “(by) you.”

Hence: (they) praise, praise, you praise!

Because of the inflectional endings of the verbs, pronouns are not necessary for the meaning and often occur for emphasis, or to add a unique twist to the meaning. For example, *þeir Eirik* = they (of) Eirik = Eirik’s men. It is impossible for me to distinguish the intended phrase, since all are theoretically possible, but the general sense of praise or glorification seems accurate.

Lines 2–3:

MIBAINMÁÐHUM
mér baen baðum

mé(r): 1st pers. sing. DAT. pron. “to, of, by me.” Rather than the indirect object, I read this as the instrumental dative used in the sense of “I am the means by which . . . is accomplished.”

baen: f. NOM.; “prayer.” *vera at baenum*, “to be at prayer.”

baðum: 1st pers. pl. pres. ind. of *biðja*, “to pray.” *biðja baen sinni*: “to pray one’s prayers.”

Hence: by me we pray (a) prayer.

Note that the indefinite article is wanting in Old Norse.

Line 3:

AHR
ahr –ár: year.

All investigators agree that this stands for “year.”

1010

twenty (the number)

Volumes have been written on the date of introduction of Arabic place-defined numbers into Scandinavia, either to prove or disprove the authenticity of the Kensington Stone and now the Spirit Pond Stones. Prof. Haugen found such words as he accepted into Old Norse to be inconsistent with 11th century usage. My knowledge (mostly from Haugen’s textbook) of 11th century usage certainly suggests a later date. In 1010 it seems very unlikely that an Arabic date would be used. Dates are usually established by the year of the King’s reign

or, in Iceland, the lawspeaker. I propose that 10–10 represents two tens or 20 (the number) and I treated it so in this paper. The year twenty of what, I have no idea.

UUU

This symbol has been interpreted in a number of ways, representing numbers or “blind” runes. Blind runes are based on the use of a single staff with horizontal markers for two or more letters making a ligature. It does not add anything meaningful to the text, which is otherwise very clearly carved. It may stand as a divider or some sort of magic or religious symbol. I have not included it as part of my interpretation.

LISA SUITLK

lesa sveit lag

lesa: inf. or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *lesa*, “to gather, pick up, grasp.”

sveit: f. NOM; “body of men, small detachment, community.”

lag: n. ACC; *lagr*, in its meaning “company” or “companionship.”

Hence: picked (the) company companions; (by adjusting the word order) (the) company picked companions.

The references I have found for *lesa* are in the context of picking things such as berries. I don’t have attestation for this use, but it seems possible.

Line 4:

12 RISI VIST 12 NOR 10
tólfreisi vest tólf nor tio

tólf = 12, the number 12

reisi: 3rd pers. pl. pres. subj. of *risa*, “they (might have) raised, started, begun.”

vist = *vest(r)*: n. ACC, “west”; adv. “westwards.” *sigla*
vestr um haf: “sail westward over the sea.”

tólf = 12, the number 12

nor = *nor(dr)*: n. ACC, “north,” adv. “northwards.”

tiu = 10, the number ten.

Hence: twelve might have begun twelve north ten.

Reisi is the only use of the subjunctive in the text. it seems intentional and suggests that the author did not know if they did indeed set out. I propose that the number 22 was intended for a total group, 12 of whom went west and 10 north.

Lines 4–5:

SAKAM LJUNK
sag um jung

saga: 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *segja*, with prep. *um*, “they tell of.”

segjum: 1st pers. pl. pres. ind. of *segja*, “we tell of.”

saga: f. NOM. with the prep. *um*, “(a) tale of.”
ljung = *ung*: adj. ACC. sing. of *ungr*, young.

Hence: they, we tell of (the) young or just the tale of the young.

Any of these translations are possible and there is no good reason to choose one over the other.

LJ represents the contested anomalous rune. Its repeated use in the text where an unvoiced *j* (*y*) should occur suggests that this is the sound intended.

Line 5:

SKIKHILMAN

skeggheilmann

Compound word formed from *skeggr*, m. “bearded, scruffy,” and *heil* which is a see-saw of meanings including “holy, lucky, healthy” as well as “unlucky, doomed” and *mann*, m. ACC. sing. of *madr*, man.

Hence: skruffy-doomed-man or bearded-holy-man, or any combination thereof.

The Norse delighted in double meanings and this phrase could well have a composite meaning, although in the context of the poem, his luck seems to have run out.

HAAKON FAN

Haakon fan(n)

Haakon: m. nom. prop. name.

fan(n): 3rd pers. sing. pret. ind. of *finna*, “found.”

Hence: Haakon found.

Everyone agrees with this.

Line 6:

HRINIKIN AT VIST

hringin(n) at vest

hringin(n): p.p. of *hringja*, “encircled, surrounded.”
Also *kringja*. The noun is *hringr*, “ring, orb, circle.”

at: prep. “at, in, to.”

vest(r): n. ACC. sing., “west.”

Hence: surrounded to the west.

Because *Hringja* is a weak verb, the expected past participle should be *hrongðr*, rather than *hringinn*, which is the p.p. for a strong verb. I don’t think this is a serious error; in vernacular usage shifts of this sort occur and I think the meaning is clear. I think the additional *i* is simply a spelling error.

BAA LAAKA

pá lága

pá = *uppi á*: prep. phrase, "upon."

lága = *löga*: m. ACC. pl. of *lögr*, "seas, body of water."

Hence: upon the waters.

Here is the later mainland proposition *på*, derived from Old Norse, *uppi á* and having the same meaning: "on, upon." Buchanan sites a reference to its use after 1300, and this would be one argument for a later date. The plural use of "seas, waters" is similar to English usage and is not unusual.

Line 7:

SILKA KEYSLRIKN

selga giysl reckn

selga = *selja*: inf. or 3rd pers. pres. ind. of *selja*, "they hand over" or "to hand over, deliver up, sell."

giysl = *gisl*: m. NOM. sing. "hostage" or proper name, *Gisli*.

reckn = *rekinn*: n. ACC. sing. with def. art., "wreck, jetsam, thing drifted ashore."

rekinn: p.p. of *reka*, "driven into exile."

Hence: (they) handed over (as) hostage (the man) drifted ashore (driven into exile).

There are several interpretations possible. (They) deliver up [3rd pers. pl. pres. ind.] *Giysl* [proper name. ACC.] who was adrift [p.p. "adrifted"]. (they) deliver up [3rd pers. pl. pres. ind.] the hostage [ACC.] (who was) adrift. The use of the p.p. seems more likely, since the dative ending would be required to define the indirect object "adrift." Since both nouns are singular, the subject must be implied [from inflection] "they."

Line 7-8

MIBAINMAÐHUM AHR 12

(cf. Lines 2-3, 3.)

Line 8:

SKVALALJOISA

skval á ljøisa

skval = *skjalla*: inf. and 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *skjalla*, "to clash, clatter," with prep. *á* "to break or burst out;" of a gale or storm.

ljøisa = *ljósta*: inf. and 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *ljósta*, "to strike or smite;" with an impersonal usage, "of a sudden gust of wind, blew up of a sudden."

Hence: (A gale) burst forth (a wind) blew up suddenly.

The juxtapositioning of two verbs with nearly the same meaning is common in Old Norse verse, and the implied storm would be understood by the reader. The transposition of *v* into *j* seems to be a spelling idiosyncrasy of

the author or the sounds might be nearly the same in this dialect.

Line 9:

BAA MAR OI UMAT

pá mar ó úmat

pá: "upon."

mar: f. ACC. sing. of *már*, "the sea."

ó: interjection, "oh!"

úmat(t): m. ACC. sing., "unmicht, faintness."

Hence: upon (the) sea oh! how fainthearted.

Line 10:

THAT SIKLA SHIBI

pá at sigla skipi

pá: pron., "those."

at: prep. "on, in, to," used elliptically with a verb to signify "being busy at."

sigla: inf. or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *sigla*, "to sail."

skipi = *skipi*: n. DAT. sing., "ship."

Hence: those (busy) sailing (the) ship.

Line 11:

RI

ri

This stands alone with no indication on the stone itself of missing words. It may have been a false start or a symbol with some other meaning.

Line 12:

NAIKJAKTA BAAMB

ná eggja akta pá umb

ná: ind. or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *ná*, "to reach, grasp," followed by an infinitive, "to be able."

eggja: inf. or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *eggja*, "to incite, urge on."

akta: f. ACC. of *aktan*, "heed, give attention."

pá: prep., "on, of."

umb: alt. form *um*: prep., "on, about, concerning."

Hence: They were able to urge attention concerning this.

Although Cleasby and Vigfusson cite *aktan* as cognate with the German *achtung*, they do not list it as a loan word. The phrase presents a sense of urgency, but the meaning is not clear. *Pá umb* for *uppi á um* is conjecture. I have not found any examples of this use.

Lines 13-14:

VINA SHIB VIÐH AKI

vinna ship við Ægi

vinna: inf. or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *vinna*, "to win, conquer, gain."

ship = *skip*: NOM/ACC., "ship."

við: prep., “against, from.”

ægi: m. DAT., “the sea, the sea god *Ægir*.”

agi: m. DAT., “terror, uproar, turbulence.”

Hence: to win the ship from *Ægir*.

This phrase is typical of Norse poetry. Its terse message is loaded with meaning to those who knew the fury of *Ægir*, god of the sea. There is also a pun here where *agi*, spelled the same way on the stone, means terror. A perfect Old Norse twist.

Line 14:

SJAUTJÁN ROIHÐHA HOIKVA
sjaután rauða höggva

sjaután = 17: the number seventeen.

rauða: inf. or 3rd. pers. pl. pres. ind. of *rauða*, “to make bloody, to kill.”

höggva: inf. or 3rd. pers. pl. pres. ind. of *höggva*, “to hack, hew, chop, smite, kill.”

Hence: Seventeen (they) made bloody (they) killed.

The runic *OI* is used throughout for ó, the differences between the umlauted ö and the long ó in the pronunciation of an unknown speaker, at an unknown date, from an unknown place, would be hard to conjecture. It is clear that the author wanted *rauða* to rhyme with *höggva* whatever the sound.

Line 15:

GOISAGANG BANINA
gósa gang banina

gósa = *gausa*: 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. of *gjósa*, (they) gush, burst out.”

kósa = *kjója*: inf. of *kjósa*, “to choose.”

gang: f. ACC. sing., “a going, a course.”

banin(n)a: m. DAT. pl. with def. art., “the deaths, that which causes deaths.”

Hence:

(they) gush (with blood) that which causes deaths, or to choose that which causes deaths.

“Gush” could represent blood or it could refer to *Ægir*’s terror gushing (wind and waves) that caused the deaths or both. Although this seems pretty contorted in English, it is not bad Old Norse, and is quite clear in a poetic context. “Choose” is less poetic, but equally possible.

Lines 15–16:

HALAÐHIR MIBAINBADUM AHR M11
(cf. Lines 2–3, 8.)

ahr = *ár*, “year.”

m11. I don’t accept the use of *m* representing 1,000, but I have no better suggestion.

Recapitulation.

Of the 74 words on the inscription, 21 are verbs, 19 are nouns. There are 6 prepositions, 2 pronouns, 1 adjective, 1 interjection and 2 adverbs.

Of the 21 verbs: *sé, gel, sjá, haela, baðum, lesa, reisi, saga, fann, hringinn, selja, rekinn, skjalla, ljosta, sigla, ná, eggja, vinna, rauða, höggva, gausa*, we find one imperative, one 3rd pers. pres. ind., one 3rd pers. pl. pres. subj., one 3rd pers. sing. pret., one 1st pers. pl. pres. ind., two infinitives, two past participles and 13 which could be either infinitive or 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. Only *baðum* is repeated in the refrain. By far the greatest number are 3rd pers. pl. pres. ind. (interpreted as the historical present). In a prose narrative a wider range of verbal inflections would be expected, but in a poetic context, this seems acceptable.

Of the 19 nouns: *gat, Óðin, deð, baen, ahr, sviet, lag vest, nor, skeggheimann, Haakon, lága, giyls (Gisl), reginn, mar, úmat, shipi, akta, ægi (Ægi), gang, bananina*, seven are in the nominative case, none in the genitive, nine in the accusative, and three in the dative case. *Baen, ahr, vest(r)* are repeated once.

Of the 6 prepositions: *um, sá, at, við, pá (uppi á)* appear three times, *um (umb)* twice and *at* once.

Of the 3 pronouns: *þeir (þé), mér pá, þeir* occurs twice and the others once.

There is one adjective, *ljung*, and one interjection, ó. *Nordr* and *vestr* may be construed as adverbs; there are no conjunctions.

The spread of the parts of speech reflects poetic construction. Prose tends to be rich in conjunctions, auxiliary verbs and modifying clauses. Though open to revision, every word of the text is accounted for in a Classical Old Norse grammatical form and context, with word relationships in keeping with poetic style. Related words and phrases as bundled together, making a sort of narrative sequence that does not necessarily occur in Norse scaldic poetry. The voice of one author resonates and the whole piece is surprisingly well composed.

Questions remain unanswered. Is there enough evidence of a runemaster fluent in Old Norse to consider the inscription authentic? What motive would a later-day Viking poet have had to abandon his creation on the edge of a little pond on the coast of Maine? Is there any evidence in the history or archaeology of the area surrounding Popham Beach, the Morse River and Spirit Pond that would lead us to our runemaster, ancient or modern?

I hope this study will encourage debate and further investigation. I invite linguists and students of Old Norse to join me in the ongoing search to unravel the mystery of the Spirit Pond Stones.

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