

Book Reviews

Gunnar W. Knutsen: *Servants of Satan and Masters of Demons: The Spanish Inquisition Trials for Superstition, Valencia and Barcelona, 1478-1700*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009, 227pp.

This is a brave, interesting, and in the end somewhat puzzling book. Students of early modern Spanish witchcraft, most notably Julio Caro Baroja and Gustav Henningsen, have long drawn attention to the fact that accusations regarding diabolical sabbaths were strictly limited to the northern half of the peninsula, and to the Pyrenean regions in particular. In the rest of Spain and Portugal there prevailed a familiar litany of love charms, fortune-telling, treasure-hunting, folk healing, and the other comparatively mild forms of magic that Inquisitors referred to as 'superstitions'. This dividing line between north and south – which strongly echoes the classic distinction between witchcraft and sorcery that long dominated anthropological studies of magic – has become accepted wisdom within early modern Iberian historiography. Yet it is a commonplace without a cause, in that to date no one has sought systematically to document this difference and identify the reasons for its existence.

Gunnar Knutsen has stepped into the gap, and offers an explanation for this unusual pattern of cultural and religious geography by comparing prosecutions of illicit magic in two jurisdictions – Barce-

lona and Valencia – of the Inquisition, the court which eventually won jurisdiction over these crimes. The contrast is stark, despite the fact that the two tribunals tried roughly the same number of cases involving magic (309 in Catalonia from 1539 to 1691, and 367 in Valencia from 1554 to 1692). Some 52 of the Catalan trials involved witchcraft, in the sense of participation in the sort of collective diabolism that prevailed in the rest of continental Europe. However, only one (!) such case appeared in Valencia. It was not that the devil had failed to visit the South; invocation of demons was in fact a standard feature of Valencian magical practices. Instead, the difference lay in how judges and other legal experts interpreted the meaning of the diabolic presence, as well as the intentions of those who actively sought it. While the Valencian inquisitors were willing to admit the possibility of at least an implicit pact between local magicians and Satan, they nevertheless refused to acknowledge the existence locally of the broader, more collective type of black magic that led to witch crazes elsewhere. What is more, they were able to impose their interpretation on local jurisprudence, and suffered no competition from other courts when dealing with crimes of magic.

Why this was so brings the reader to the central part of this study. Knutsen is quick to recognize the importance of the differences in political culture and climate be-

tween Catalonia and Valencia. The strong constitutional traditions of the former ensured that the Inquisitors there, who were seen largely as foreign (that is, Castilian) intruders, would never have a free hand. This was especially true of crimes in which more than one set of courts was involved, as was the case with witchcraft. The vast majority of prosecutions for black magic in the Principality originated outside the Inquisition's jurisdiction, in local venues, above all in municipal and seigniorial courts. It was only occasionally, and to limited effect, that the Holy Office was able to claim for itself cases opened elsewhere. When it did so, it proved remarkably lenient in comparison with the secular courts, which executed hundreds of women for diabolical witchcraft during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the end, Inquisitors from the two tribunals converged in their handling of crimes of magic. But thanks to radically different local circumstances, the balance of witchcraft and sorcery diverged notably in the two regions. As the author puts it,

the Holy Office in Valencia was able to intervene swiftly and decisively in cases which certainly had the potential to evolve into witchcraft if tried by judges who were looking for witches. In Valencia nobody looked for witches, and none were found. But many, or even most, Catalan judges were free to look for witches without

inquisitorial interference, and hundreds of witches were found and hanged. (p. 177)

Knutsen thoroughly documents the separate paths the two tribunals took, and shows that they were more of opportunity than of understanding. However, he is after bigger game. The diverse fates of magic in the two areas raise a deeper problem. Denunciations and witness testimony suggest that popular belief in sabbaths and other features of diabolical witchcraft flourished outside the Inquisition in Catalonia, yet apparently did not loom as large among Valencians. Why so dramatic a difference? He offers as an answer the presence of the minority of *moriscos*, or descendants of converted Muslims. According to Knutsen, the *moriscos*, and through them society at large, inherited an Islamic approach to supernatural beings and actions that was based on a world-view which lacked the powerful and autonomous demonic figure of Christian tradition. Thus, despite a substantial overlap in practices, including the invocation of demons, the Inquisitors and the rest of society saw Muslim (and other) magic as less diabolical, and thus as less of a threat, than did secular judges in Catalonia and elsewhere in the north.

This is an intriguing suggestion, but I fear it is too simple an explanation for so complex a situation. Its plausibility when applied to the direct, one-to-one contrast between Valencia and Barcelona quickly gives way when one takes into account the broader distribution of the assertion

and absence of belief in diabolical witchcraft. There were many areas in early modern Catholic culture that witnessed very little presence of diabolism, yet had few or no ties to Islam. Such was the case of Galicia, under Muslim control for even less time than Catalonia, and the same could be said for much of the rest of northern Spain. But it is above all the comparison with Italy which works against this hypothesis. A quick glance at studies such as Ruth Martin's work on early modern Venice shows virtually no sabbaths and devil-worship there – and this despite its close proximity to the very heartland of diabolical witch hunts. In short, one would not discount the diffuse influence of Islam on the peculiar geography of magical beliefs in Spain. However, the real problem is that this geography is not so peculiar, for it was neatly replicated in Italy, which was similarly divided between a South replete with superstitious practices, yet nearly completely lacking in sabbaths, and a North which proved hospitable to centuries worth of diabolical conspiracies and sabbaths, especially in its more mountainous zones.

This book has several indisputable merits. It opens with a markedly efficient summary of Inquisitorial procedure, and it deftly handles the comparative analysis of the caseloads of the two tribunals. Above all, it grapples with an important and challenging question, that of the spatial distribution of magical and witch beliefs, which in turn raises issues of fundamental

importance regarding the diffusion of ideas and myths, and the existence of differential topographies in the juridical as well as in the cultural sphere. The answers Knutsen offers to this question ring truer in regard to policy than to beliefs. One cannot help conclude that a broader, less relentless focus would have made for a more convincing argument in the end. The breadth I am referring to here is not just geographic. Knutsen clings all too closely to a single set of sources, the *relaciones de causas* or summaries of Inquisitorial prosecutions. Looking beyond them would have turned up other situations and episodes which merit consideration in a study of this sort. To cite an example: the only individual to my knowledge reputed to have been executed as a witch finder in early modern Catalonia – Joan Malet, a sort of local Matthew Hopkins whom Knutsen mentions several times – was a *morisco*. (One source even says he was from Valencia!) Granted, it is only one anecdote. But it does raise an eyebrow.

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Geoffrey Samuel: *The Origins of Yoga and Tantra: Indic Religions to the Thirteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 422pp.

There is much talk about the need for in-depth, interdisciplinary works on early Indian religious history, but such books seldom seem to mate-

rialize. Geoffrey Samuel's book on the origins of Yoga and Tantra is in many ways a refreshing addition to this field. Samuel is very ambitious, especially considering the contentious nature of Tantra, and very well read: he carefully utilizes the results of many recent studies, and when he declares that he wants to locate Yoga and Tantra not only in texts but in social reality, he really tries to do so. By making use of archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and iconographic evidence, Samuel moves away from the overemphasis on textual study that still characterizes so much of Indic studies. Further, since Samuel explicitly states that he wishes to write not only for scholars of Indian religions but also for practitioners of Yoga and Tantra, his book is noticeably reader-friendly. It contains many useful illustrations, charts and maps. All of this makes Samuel's book very stimulating reading.

Unlike many other scholars, Samuel does not start out with the Indus Valley cultural system; rather, by comparing the enormous variety of interpretations that have gathered around the well-known Indus Valley seals such as that of the 'proto-Śiva' (e.g., by Atre, Hildebeitel, Jayakar, Kosambi and Parpola), he effectively explodes the idea that they would be able to tell us anything certain about the origins of yogic practice. Rather, Samuel takes his starting point in the second urbanization of South Asia around 500 BCE, continuing his narrative all the way to 1200 CE, by which Muslim rule

had been established over most of North and North-East India and the Buddhist intellectual centers of this area had been destroyed. Towards the end of the book, he does offer some words on the later developments of Yoga and Tantra, rather as an afterthought.

By using the term 'Indic religions' in the title of the work, Samuel wishes to emphasize that his study is not orthogenetic, that is, a study of the development of purely Hindu ideas. Rather, he goes to great length to show the close connections between the Brahmanic, Jain and Buddhist traditions in pre-modern India. This is a reaction against the rather dated idea of Jainism and Buddhism being simply reactions against Brahmanism, but Samuel also brings in the present here, by some considered words about the political implications of historical studies of ancient India today.

The book is divided into two parts, following two introductory chapters. The first part traces the history of meditation and Yoga, the second that of Tantra. These parts are also chronological: the first part extends to the Brahmanic alternative to the śramaṇa traditions, and the second goes on from the foundation of the Gupta Empire around 320 CE to the establishment of Muslim rule over North India.

One of the central themes of the work is an alternative understanding of the second urbanization of South Asia. Building mainly on an unpublished manuscript of

the American Indologist Anthony Hopkins, Samuel argues that North India in the 6th century BCE comprised two discrete worlds: the Vedic-Brahmanic cultural region of Kuru-Pañcāla and a non-Aryan Buddhist/Jain world in the Central Gangetic plain around Kosala and Magadha. Samuel connects these two worlds, respectively, with the so-called Lunar and Solar dynasties of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. In particular, he singles out King Janaka of Videha as an example of the 'wisdom kings' that characterized the Central Gangetic plain, in contrast with the 'warrior kings' of Kuru-Pañcāla. He further characterizes these two cultural complexes as centered on the *brahmacārin* (celibate student) and the *mithuna* (erotically engaged couple) respectively. While there may be some truth to these grand assertions, they do seem very simplistic, even misleading. Where is the *mithuna* in the teachings of Mahavira?

In trying to grasp the interplay between Brahmanic and heterodox practices in Ancient India, Samuel gives examples from contemporary Thailand. While these examples at times seem useful, their geographic and historical distance from the material at hand are not without their dangers. Particularly problematic is the section on gender attitudes across South and Southeast Asia (pp. 89–93, though compare 167–70), where Samuel takes a rather romantic view of the positive orientation towards sexuality within 'tribal' communities.

What about all of that Tantra, then? Without attempting to present a comprehensive definition of the term, Samuel discusses its many meanings within different strands of Indic religions. However, his main interest lies in what he calls 'transgressive Tantra', the beginning of which he locates in a convergence between low-caste ritual practitioners who supported South Indian kings by absorbing impurity (and perhaps the mysterious Vedic *vrātyas* in the North), cult-groups such as the Pāśupata and Kāpālikas and a new style of ritual created by the court Brahmins of the new Brahmanic regimes of the fourth century onwards. This is a plausible account, though at least some discussion of the philosophical developments of Tantra would have helped to further nuance the presentation. While clearly explaining the differences between this transgressive Tantra and the 'nookie nirvana' Tantra of the West today, to borrow Hugh B. Urban's felicitous phrase, Samuel is careful in noting that modern Western Tantra deserves to be taken seriously as a cultural development within Western society. Compared with the open disdain of some Tantric scholars, this is a refreshing point of view.

Of particular interest is the author's treatment of the development of Buddhist Tantra, touching for instance on the political implications of the idea of the Maṇḍala. There is some Tantra in Jainism – for example in Hemacandra's *Yogaśāstra* – but it is in the study of the parallel

development of Tantric ideas in Śaivism and vajrayāna Buddhism that Samuel really gets to showcase the commonality of Indic traditions that is such an important topic for him.

One useful side to Samuel's book is its richness of sources. At times, however, this inclusiveness seems somewhat uncritical. For example, while pointing out the conjectural nature of David Gordon White's typology of Śaiva Tantra, particularly its 'first stage', Samuel nevertheless makes extensive use of it. A more cautious approach would perhaps have been more advisable. Nevertheless, the encyclopedic character of this work makes it a useful addition to the library of anyone interested in the growth and development of Indian religions.

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Michael Stausberg (ed.): *Contemporary Theories of Religion – a critical companion*. London: Routledge, 2009, 309 pp.

The starting points of the academic theoretical discussion of religion can be dated at least as far back as 150 years ago. The need to find an explanation as to what religion is about has a much longer history, but it can be argued that the tradition of systematic theory formulation in the study of religion(s) was created in the mid-1800s. Since Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, the theoretical discussion of religion has

– at least to some extent – been determined by the debate between naturalistic and religionist views. The basis of religion has been traced, on the one hand, to the natural world and to the operations of the society or the individual mind (naturalists); on the other hand it has been argued that religion always ultimately refers to the world outside our natural reality (religionists). Of course, most of the empirical research into religious beliefs and activities has been carried out without need for or interest in the theoretical debate about the origins of religion.

In any case, when we begin to discuss theories of religion, this confrontation seems inevitably to appear. The history of the debate has been presented, for example, by Ivan Strenski in his book *Thinking about religion – a historical introduction to the theories of religion* (2006). In the present book, *Contemporary Theories of Religion – a critical companion*, the discussion continues, as many of the theories of religion that it introduces fundamentally discuss whether the starting points of religion lead to the natural world or to a transcendental reality. Interestingly, in some of the theories naturalistic models of explanation have been used to support a religionist interpretation of religion, as is the case with Andrew Newberg's neurotheological explanations. On the other hand – and perhaps as a counterbalance – the book also presents the theoretical ideas of Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins, whose agenda is to support an atheist ideology.

The book is structured around articles that introduce monographs which have formulated a particular theory of religion. These articles are composed as book-reviews which, firstly, depict briefly the author(s) of the book(s); secondly, introduce the basic premisses of the theory; and, thirdly, go through the theory critically, both by referencing earlier criticism and by presenting critical remarks by the writer of the article. The book introduces 17 theories of religion, in addition to which there is an introduction and a concluding section, where the editor, Michael Stausberg, compares the theories from different perspectives. Due to the rich number of theories the articles are relatively short, mostly well below 20 pages, which makes them quite quick to read. On the other hand, they can't go very deep into the theory, as a result of which the writers have to compress and simplify often quite extensive and complex theories. In this task the articles succeed relatively well, and, generally speaking, reading this book offers quite an interesting overview of the contemporary theoretical discussion of religion.

In the introduction by Stausberg there is little reference to the earlier theoretical debate on the study of religion. Surely this has been examined in other studies, such as in the above-mentioned book of Strenski, or in the studies by Daniel Pals (*Eight Theories of Religion*, 2006) and Samuel Preus (*Explaining Religion*, 1987). However, if we consider that the book is intended as a textbook for

students of religion, the introduction should have made clearer links from contemporary research to the history of the study of religion, since no theory is built from scratch, but is always based on previous research and theoretical debate. Some contemporary theoretical discussions tend to ignore this fact, and, instead explicitly dissociate themselves from earlier theoretical thinking. A good example of this kind of rhetorical strategy can be found from Thomas Lawson's and Robert McCauley's book *Rethinking Religion* (1990), introduced in this volume, which devotes considerable space to a polemical critique of previous research in the field.

The book presents the current theoretical discussion of the study of religion, which is largely dominated by the 'explaining religion' tendency. Thus, the book primarily introduces studies aligned with the naturalistic paradigm. This paradigm is often coupled to theories that build on cognitive psychology and/or evolutionary theory and its developments. Most of the theories discussed in this book can be seen more or less as part of that field of research. In addition to these theories, the book also introduces some sociological theory formulations. Of these, however, the theories of Niklas Luhmann and Roy Rappaport can perhaps better be seen as belonging to the functionalist (or system-theory) paradigm of the 1960s and 1970s. It is also doubtful whether their theories are widely used in contemporary research.

The sociological theory of Martin Riesebrodt introduced by the editor Stausberg is an exception, since with its emphasis on an emic approach, it represents the interpretative, 'understanding religion' tendency than the 'explaining religion' tendency to which the other theories of the book are committed. The viewpoints of the book would have been more varied and the value of the book higher if, besides the theory by Riesebrodt, there had been other interpretative theories, such as the influential theory of religion by the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger presented in a book *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (1993). This choice would also have brought some relief to the androcentric dilemma of the book: as Stausberg notes in his introduction, all the theories introduced in the book are written by men, and all the articles evaluating the theories are written by men. This profile might perhaps give the impression that the theoretical discussion in the study of religion is a male domain. Surely – as Stausberg notes – all anthologies have their history. However, this is not a very good reason for omitting, for example, the theory of Hervieu-Léger. Nor is it an elegant way to explain away the androcentric nature of the book.

Stausberg writes in his introduction that the authors of the articles were mostly selected because of their critical sympathy 'with the main thrust of the allotted theories' (p. 10). At its best, this kind of attitude produces articles which equally highlight the strengths and

weaknesses of the theory under scrutiny. The article 'Religion as unintended product of brain function in the "standard cognitive science of religion model"' by Jeppe Sinning Jensen is a good example of this type of a well-balanced text. In his article Jensen introduces and evaluates the cognitive theory of religion by Pascal Boyer and Ilkka Pyysiäinen. He first introduces the basic ideas of the cognitive study of religion and its relationship to other research traditions in the study of religion. Secondly, he locates Boyer's and Pyysiäinen's theoretical background and the sources of inspiration, in which Dan Sperber's ideas have been pivotal. Thirdly, he presents the key notions of the theories and the 'abundant' critique which these ideas have confronted. Jensen's attitude towards the 'standard cognitive science of religion' is clearly sympathetic, but not without a sharp critique of some of the problems in this theory, such as the 'distaste for culture' (p. 146) that the representatives of this trend often display.

One of the serious drawbacks of the book is the fact that not all of the authors of the articles implement such as critical sympathy to the theory they are evaluating. The attitude of the authors towards the theories is *de facto* quite colored. Some writers seem to agree with the author about the ideas of the theory they are evaluating, and their attitudes range from laudatory to critical appreciation. For example the article by Gustavo Benavides about the work of Walter Burkert

offers virtually no criticism of the theory. Other writers, in turn, seem to have difficulties in hiding their irritation at the weaknesses in the theory, and fail to find any strengths, as is the case with, for example, the article by Gregory D. Alles in which he introduces and evaluates the rational choice theory of Rodney Stark and Roger Finke.

In the introduction, Stausberg writes that the criteria for the choice of theories introduced in the book was that they present 'theoretical ideas that have been systematized and unfolded, and often illustrated with empirical data' (p. 9), and that they have been presented in the form of a monograph. Of course, exclusions has to be made, for one reason or another, and these criteria are perhaps no worse than any other. The problem here is that the editor has also made an exception, by choosing for evaluation two 'pamphlets' of the 'New Atheists', in which theory formation clearly plays a minor role in relation to the critique of religion. The writer of the article, Armin Geertz, acknowledges this, and also admits to agreeing with Dennett and Dawkins 'in many ways' (p. 250). Although Richard Dawkins' theoretical idea of memes is an interesting one for the study of religion, it is still difficult to understand why these pamphlets have been included in the anthology.

In spite of these reservations, the book as a whole makes very intriguing reading, and demonstrates well the vitality of the theoretical debate in the study of religion. The rise of

the naturalistic paradigm over the past 20 years has clearly done good for the study of religion, and even with its shortcomings, the book at hand draws a fine picture of the contemporary state of the debate.

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Victor Roudometof and Vasilios N. Makrides (eds): *Orthodox Christianity in 21st Century Greece: The Role of Religion in Culture, Ethnicity and Politics*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010, xv + 258pp.

Greek Orthodoxy is one of the most neglected topics in the scientific study of Christianity in contemporary Europe. The main focus of almost all scholars within the field of religious studies after the collapse of the Iron Curtain was on the Orthodox communities of the countries previously belonging to the communist bloc. This recent edited volume about Greek Orthodox Christianity in twenty-first-century Greece is both interesting and innovative, because it addresses many issues regarding religion and society in contemporary Greece from other perspectives than the ecclesiastical and theological angles. The editors of the volume are both prominent scholars who have well established knowledge of Greek Orthodoxy and Greek society. Victor Roudometof is Professor at the department of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cyprus. and Vasilios

Makrides has been Professor of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Erfurt, Germany, since 1999, and they have both published many books and articles about Greek Orthodoxy and religion in contemporary Greece.

The volume starts with a foreword by the well known sociologist of religion, Grace Davie, who suggests that the contribution of this book is to enable outsiders (among others, non-Greek speakers) to penetrate the Greek case a little further in order to understand the subtleties and contradictions in Greek religion and its continuing significance for national life (p.xiii). The foreword is followed by an illuminating introduction by the two editors, in which they provide a brief description of their goals and of the following chapters. The volume is divided into two parts, each part consisting of five chapters: the first entitled 'Orthodox Christianity, Greek Ethnicity and Politics', and the second 'Orthodox Christianity and Greek Culture'.

The editors state that the goal of this volume is to allow scholars and researchers to use the Greek experience as a means for fleshing out some of the institutional characteristics and cultural attributes clearly identified with the Eastern Orthodox tradition (p.2). In this respect, the volume does not set out to examine the Greek case in isolation from broader European and/or global trends, and this is important, because until recently the majority of the studies of Greek Orthodoxy

treated Greece as a particular and exceptional case study, isolated from the global or even the European context. Here, on the contrary, the goal of the editors is to place the Greek case within the context of contemporary studies in the social sciences and cultural history on the relations between religion, globalization and European modernity. Consequently, since Greek Orthodoxy lives in a constantly changing world, this book shows how it changes and adapts itself to new exigencies, even if this happens in its own particular way and even if such changes are not always evident at first glance (p.15).

The majority of the contributors are younger scholars, well educated and already known both in Greece and abroad for their work on the study of Greek Orthodoxy. It has to be underlined that until recently, issues of religion and politics and religion and society in Greece were mainly examined either from a historical and legal or a theological and ecclesiastical perspective. Here, by contrast, the contributions address these issues from sociological, anthropological and historical perspectives, which have largely been neglected by mainstream scholars in the past. As a consequence, the main approaches used are qualitative, i.e. ethnography, participant observation, semi-structured interviews, etc. This kind of research is, in my view, much more fruitful than the previous sterile theological and ecclesiastical descriptive studies, which were far removed from Greek social reality.

The themes examined range very widely: Greek Orthodoxy and globalization/ modernization; the financial and organisational scandals of 2005 within the Orthodox Church; Greek Orthodoxy and non-Orthodox minorities; women in Orthodoxy; Islam and Muslims within the Greek Orthodox milieu; the controversy about the construction of a Muslim mosque in Athens; religion and welfare in Greece and the role of the Orthodox Church; Greek citizens' faith and trust in religion and the Orthodox Church (this is the only quantitative contribution in the volume) and finally, religion and popular culture, which is studied through the example of a young monk's pop band. All of topics have provoked extensive discussion and conflict within Greek society during the last decade or so, and could be considered as the most characteristic issues in the first decade of the twenty-first century. However, some other issues could have been included in the volume. For example, the huge conflict between the State and the Orthodox Church of Greece about the removal of religious affiliation from identity cards, which took place in 2000 and led to major protest and the organisation of massive rallies by the Church, could have been included, in order to enable non-Greek readers to form at least an initial understanding of the issue. Furthermore, a special chapter about the legal status of the relations between the state and the Orthodox Church could have been helpful for the non-Greek reader, in

order to illustrate the background of the relation between religion and politics in Greece. This criticism does not imply, however, that the volume lacks either in interest or in thematic range, and the reader can undoubtedly gain a relatively thorough overview of contemporary Greek Orthodoxy after reading this volume. The only other critical point, in my view, is that the chapter regarding Greek Orthodoxy and non-Orthodox minorities (part 1, chapter 5) would have benefited from a contribution by a scholar with better background in the study of religious minorities.

Overall, this volume is a very useful and fruitful one, which casts new light on the issue of Orthodoxy in Greek society, a light that is neither theological and ecclesiastical nor exclusively historical. The volume is of potential interest for researchers and scholars who are interested in knowing about the social and political role of Orthodoxy in contemporary Greece. It is an objective and scientific contribution free of overtly ideological and biased argumentation, and could lead to fertile further research in the near future. Furthermore, it offers a fresh glimpse of the various facets of contemporary Greek Orthodoxy and its ongoing efforts to cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century.

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