Theseus, Helen of Troy, and the House of Minos

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In February 2006 while on vacation, this author read Bettany Hughes' biography entitled *Helen of Troy* [1]. In Chapter 6, Ms. Hughes describes a liaison between a very young Helen and very old Theseus, king of Athens. Ms. Hughes' description generated the kernel of an idea. If Helen was about 12 years old and Theseus was about 50 years old at the time, then this incident occurred about 20 years before the beginning of the Trojan War -- assuming that Helen was about 30 years old when she journeyed to Troy. Theseus was alive about 20 years before the Trojan War! What an eye opening moment! If true, then what would be the approximate date when Theseus participated in Athens 3rd Tribute to Knossos [2]? One could calculate an approximate date by constructing a time line or chronology.

The second part of this short discourse is to use the time line. By constructing the time line one could discern something about Minos, King of Knossos. References to Minos abound, but they are somewhat contradictory. Sir Arthur Evans named a entire civilization -- the Minoan Civilization -- after him; this may have been a misnomer. There are also references to ethnicity -- especially languages spoken on the Aegean Islands -- relating to King Minos; these are crucial to gain an understanding of who were the Minoans and what was the Minoan Civilization.

1. The Trojan War. -- One crucial point in constructing the time line was assigning a date to the beginning of the Trojan War.

   The question is: when did the Trojan War start? The consensus is that the Trojan War in Homer's epic *The Iliad* occurred sometime between 1250 and 1150 B.C.E. (Before the Christian Era). One problem centers around which destruction level comprises the fall of the Troy in the epic: the palatial Troy VI vs. the down and out Troy VIIa. The end of Troy VI (1300 B.C.E.) is viewed as too early while the end of Troy VIIa (1190 B.C.E.) is viewed as too late. The second problem centers on the dates assigned to the destruction levels by archeologists. Different archeologists assign different dates to the destruction levels. C.W. Blegen argued for a date around 1190 B.C.E. [3] Today, most scholars believe that the Mycenaean centers were destroyed by 1180 B.C.E. and could not have launched a united force against Troy. So 1190 B.C.E. seems too late.

   The archeological evidence suggests that Troy was destroyed at least twice during the 1250 to 1180 B.C.E. time frame -- maybe 20 to 30 years apart. The first destruction could have been caused by an earthquake, which caused the upper superstructure to collapse and ended the rule of the royal household. Sometime 20 to 30 years later a weakened, leaderless, and less powerful Troy was attacked again. This time looted and destroyed more definitely by military action -- maybe by the same people. If 1190 B.C.E. was the second time that Troy was destroyed, then the prior destruction level
would date to sometime in the last quarter of the 13th Century B.C.E. (1225 to 1200 B.C.E.).

The timeline assumes that the Trojan War was one long siege that occurred between 1220 and 1210 B.C.E.

2. Theseus of Athens and Helen of Troy. -- The second time point centers on a liaison between Theseus, King of Athens, and Helen of Sparta (more famous as Helen of Troy). Chapter Six of Ms. Hughes book describes the incident between Theseus, an old man maybe close to 50 years old, and a 12 year old Helen, daughter of the King of Sparta. If Helen is 30 at the start of the Trojan War, then the Theseus/Helen incident occurred 18 years previously (30 minus 12 = 18 years). If the Trojan War started in 1220, then the Theseus/Helen incident occurred about 1238 B.C.E. (1220 B.C.E. plus 18 years=1238 B.C.E.).

3. Theseus of Athens and Minos of Knossos. -- If the Theseus/Helen incident occurred in 1238 B.C.E., then when did Theseus escape from the labyrinth? One can assume that Theseus was about 25 years of age when he and his band of Athenian youths escaped from the labyrinth. Then the Theseus/labyrinth incident occurred 25 years before the Theseus/Helen incident, in about 1263 B.C.E. (1238 B.C.E. plus 25 years=1263 B.C.E.).

4. Constructing the Timeline. – Since the timeline is calculated based on a lot of assumptions, one result is that there is a lack of precision. Since this is an exercise in trying to piece together fragments of information into sequential actions, precision and precise dates are too much to demand from imprecise, contradictory fragments of information. The dates provided are very approximate and, of course, all dates are B.C.E.

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**HYPOTHETICAL TIMELINE**

pre 1450 B.C.E.- The Palace of Knossos is ruled by the "Minoans".

The Minoans used it as a "town" center (for social, administrative, and especially religious functions).

ca. 1375-1450 Palace of Knossos is occupied by Mycenaean Greeks (based on the Linear B tablets that were found there).[4]

When the Mycenaean Greeks moved in, they used it more like a castle without walls. It is where the Mycenaean Greek king lived. It is where he centrally administered his vast estates and holdings. [The

decentralized Minoan system of palaces was abandoned.] It is where his military troops were billeted. The Linear B tablets at Knossos tablets refer to parts of chariots, some broken, some without wheels. If assembled the tablets indicate there would have been about 100 chariots[5].

Around 1375 the Palace of Knossos was partially destroyed, possibly due to an earthquake. It was not re-built or re-occupied except by intermittent squatters. Without walls, with too many access points, and with its vast outer perimeter, the Palace of Knossos would have been a difficult structure to defend militarily.

So after 1375, the Palace of Knossos was partially abandoned and could have been used as a prison. Internees could have been held there under "house" arrest?

So where did the king live at Knossos? Best guess is the Royal Villa. According to archeologists it was built ca. 1400 B.C.E. and was destroyed by fire ca. 1200 B.C.E.

c. 1305-1375 (See the section on the House of Minos below)

c. 1325 Minos is born.

c. 1305 Minos becomes king and his reign starts. Androgeus, son of King Minos and Pasiphae, is born.

King Minos begins building a fleet to protect his shipping lanes from pirates [Thucydides].

c. 1290 Theseus, hero, prince, and later King of Athens, is born.

c. 1285 Androgeus (aged about 20), son of King Minos and Pasiphae, is killed on territory
ruled by Athens. [King Minos and Pasiphae both have to be about 40 years old when their 20 year old son dies.] King Minos sends an expeditionary force that ravages the territory ruled by Athens.

**ca. 1283**

Athens and Knossos sign a peace treaty. King Minos is on the mainland at the head of his expeditionary force when the treaty is signed. King Minos selects the first 7 boys and 7 girls that make up the 1st Tribute, and returns to Knossos with them. King Minos holds funeral games in honor of his dead son, Androgeus. The 14 Athenian youths are awarded as prizes (slaves) to the winners of the games.

**ca. 1274**

Nine years later, Athens sends the 2nd Tribute of 14 youths to Knossos.

**ca. 1265**

Theseus, aged about 25, goes to Knossos on the Island of Crete as part of Athens's 3rd Tribute.

The Athenian youths held at the Palace of Knossos would not have wanted to escape: the treaty between Athens and Knossos would have ended; a renewal of hostilities would have brought death and destruction onto their families, their friends, and their neighbors in Athens again. These Athenian youths probably accepted their fate, lived in the ruins of the Palace, and could wander its vast labyrinthian hallways while awaiting their final disposition.

Theseus and the Athenian youths fight their way out of the Palace of Knossos and escape from Crete. Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Knossos, joins them in their escape by ship. This part of the story ends with the issue of Athens' tribute unresolved. Athens could still be attacked by King Minos.

**ca. 1260-1265**

Instead, King Minos and his fleet sail to

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Sicily in pursuit of Daedalus who revealed certain state secrets. King Minos is murdered in Sicily. The stories about Minos do not mention that the fleet sent to Sicily was destroyed there. So, one can assume that the fleet returned to Crete.

ca. 1260-1250
Negotiations occur between Theseus and Catreus son of King Minos about the marriage with Phaedra. She is one daughter of King Minos and sister of Ariadne as well as of Catreus.

Their marriage would have diplomatically ended all hostilities between Athens and Knossos, and would have brought the issue of Athenian tributes to a peaceful resolution.

ca. 1250
Helen, daughter of the King of Sparta, is born.

ca. 1238
Theseus, aged around 50 (Plutarch citing Hellanicus) has a liaison with Helen, aged around 12. Theseus wants to marry Helen but it is socially unacceptable to marry a girl this young. Theseus takes Helen to Aphidnae on territory ruled by Athens and places her in the care of his mother to wait until Helen is old enough to marry.

ca. 1235
Helen is captured and returned to Sparta. Theseus is not welcomed back by the Athenians who have chosen another leader.

ca. 1230
Helen's father holds the wedding games. The 24 to 36 contestants have to pay (an entry fee) to play. The winner of the games will supposedly win Helen's hand in marriage and will succeed him as King of Sparta. Helen is 19 or 20 years old.

ca. 1220-1230
After the Helen incident, Theseus' life, career, and fortune decline precipitously (Plutarch). Theseus, formerly King of

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Athens, dies on the Island of Scyros. [He would have probably been in his 60s]

ca. 1220

King Menelaus of Sparta leaves his wife, Helen, and their house guest, Paris, alone at the castle. Menelaus has to go to Crete. One story is that he has to meet with Idomeneus, king of Knossos. Another version is that Menelaus has to attend the funeral of Catreus, his grandfather. If Catreus has died and Idomeneus is the new king, then Agamemnon's brother (Menelaus) needs to go to Crete to welcome their cousin Idomeneus into the Mycenaean community of ruler-kings. Menelaus also needs to gauge whether Idomeneus has any immediate plans to use the navy that is now at his disposal [foreign policy intentions].

While Menelaus is away, Helen aged maybe 30 and Paris go to Troy.

ca. 1210-1220

The Trojan War [hypothetical dates used by this author]

Theseus and Phaedra (Catreus' sister) had two sons. These two sons join the Athenian contingent that goes to Troy. They would have been in their 30s when the war begins but they return before the war is over.

c. 1200 B.C.E.

Telemachus, son of Odysseus and Penelope, travels to Sparta and Pylos, seeking information about the whereabouts of his father [6]. Ten years AFTER the end of the Trojan War, Sparta and Pylos are still thriving.

c. 1200-1180

Most Mycenaean Greek centers are burnt down (Polos) or abandoned (Mycenae Castle)

The chronology above is based on three time points. One is the beginning of the Trojan War. The second is the liaison between Theseus and Helen. The third is Theseus and
Athens's 3rd Tribute to Knossos. The hypothetical dates assigned to these events indicate that all these events and all of the people referred to in the hypothetical timeline above lived sometime in the 13th Century B.C.E. (1200 to 1299 B.C.E.), or about 80 to 100 years before the start of the Trojan War. The dates also indicate that the Trojan War (ca. 1210-1220 B.C.E.) could have happened earlier but not much later if the 1200-1180 B.C.E. dates for the destruction of the Mycenaean centers is firm.

4. The House of Minos. -- Some individuals have proposed two different genealogical tables for the House of Minos again based on the ancient writers.

One table (termed Geneology1) suggests that there was only one King Minos and it can be found at http://www.timelessmyths.com/classical/family5.html#Crete.

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Dorus
 | Tectamus
 | Asterius (marries Europa, a single unwed mother with 3 children: Minos, Sarpedon, Rhadamanthys)
 | Minos (Asterius appoints Minos as his successor) (Minos asks Sarpedon and Rhadamanthys to leave Crete) (Minos has at least 8 legitimate children by Pasiphae)
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Another table (termed Geneology2) suggests that there were two King Minos (a good Minos and a bad Minos) and it can be found at http://homepage.mac.com/cparada/GML/Minos2.html.

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Dorus
 | Tectamus
 | Asterius 3rd (marries Europa, a single unwed mother with 3 children: Minos, Sarpedon, and Rhadamanthys)
 | Minos 1st (Asterius 3rd appoints Minos 1st as his successor) (Minos 1st asks Sarpedon and Rhadamanthys to leave Crete)
 | Lycastus 1st
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Minos 2nd (Minos 2d has at least 8 legitimate children by Pasiphae)

The hypothetical timeline above takes the conservative approach. It assumes that there is only one Minos. However, the Minos(1) plus Minos(2) genealogy is intriguing because it would provide a list of kings ruling Knossos dating much further back in time.

4. How can the timeline be used? -- The timeline can be used to reconcile some contradictory references regarding Minos.

To cite one example, Thucydides wrote:

"The islanders, too, were great pirates. These islanders were Carians and Phoenicians, by whom most of the islands were colonized, as was proved by the following act. During the purification of Delos by Athens in this war all the graves in the island were taken up, and it was found that above half their inmates were Carians: they were identified by the fashion of the arms buried with them, and by the method of interment, which was the same as the Carians still follow. But as soon as Minos had formed his navy, communication by sea became easier, as he colonized most of the islands, and thus expelled the malefactors..." [7]

In this passage, Thucydides is suggesting that the island of Delos had once been inhabited by two non-Greek speaking people. Readers can infer that Carians and Phoenicians had once been residents of the island and not simply transients because they lived there long enough to have died and been buried there. The Carians spoke an Indo-European somewhat related to Luvian and Hittite [8]. The Phoenicians spoke a West Semitic language similar to Canaanite and Hebrew and were originally from the Levant.

Thucydides' account is somewhat problematic. First, the reader can not infer for how long the Carians and the Phoenicians had been buried on Delos. Thucydides' account suggests that Carians had been resident on Delos at the time that Minos built his fleet. The timeline above suggests that was around 1300 B.C.E. if not earlier. Second, the reader has to accept that when Thucydides refers to the malefactors as Carians, Thucydides literally means Carians. Or did he designate the bodies as Carians because Thucydides' readers understood who Carians were but may not have understood who Leleges were? The judgment was made that they were Carians based on the "fashion of arms" and "by method of interment". The people interred may have only looked like Carians because they used similar arms and a similar method of interment.

Herodotus elaborates on this story:

"...The Carians, now a mainland people, were originally islanders. Long ago, when they inhabited the islands, they were known as Leleges and were subjects of Minos; but as far as I have been able to gather information on the subject, they never paid tribute in money but manned his ships whenever he had need of them; and in this way, because Minos had great military success and extended his conquests over a wide area, they

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became in his day by far the most famous of nations..."[9]

So Herodotus seems to support Thucydides' account. Carians and not some similar looking people were the inhabitants that Minos evicted. But then Herodotus interjects the following complication.

"Long after this period [i.e., when Minos evicted some of them from the islands, the remainder of] the Carians were driven from the islands by the Dorians and the Ionians, and settled on the mainland: that, at any rate, is the account the Cretans give -- though the Carians deny it, and claim to have been mainlanders from the first and never to have been known by any other name than their present one..."

What Thucydides and Herodotus agree on is that Minos evicted pirates from the islands. These pirates most likely were Carians or a similar clad people, the Leleges. Both Thucydides and Herodotus agree that these people were non-Greek. Thucydides and Herodotus also agree that Minos may have offered jobs as seamen to the remainder of the non-Greek population of the islands. If Minos had used the Carians or the Leleges to man his ships, then there was a group of non-Greek speaking people that continued to be resident on some of the territory under the control of Knossos circa 1300 B.C.E.

The reader should also be aware of the following:

First, Fritz Schachermeyr produced several maps showing place names with the consonant cluster -nth- or -nd- (Corinth) as well as -ssos (Knossos on Crete, Halicarnassus in Caria) [10]. Place names of these types seem to be related to the Indo-European Anatolian languages (Luwian, Hittite). These place names cluster along the southwest coast of Anatolia in the areas known as Caria and Lykia. To a lesser extent these place names can also be found on the Aegean Islands and mainland Greece.

Second, when Minos became king at Knossos, he asked his two brothers to leave -- probably to avoid internal strife. One brother, Rhadamanthus, (the reader should note that his name includes the -nth- consonant cluster) seems to be associated with the administration of some of the Aegean Islands. The second brother, Sarpedon, seems to have migrated to and become king of the Lykians in Anatolia. Lykia is the hinterland beyond the city limits of Miletos (the Hittite "Milliwanda"). Miletos was a Greek colony in Anatolia dating to before the Trojan War.

So, the reader can see (1) the connections between populations on some of the Aegean Islands with populations on the southwest coast of Anatolia and (2) the administration of these Greek and non-Greek populations by members of the House of Minos (Minos, Rhadamanthus, Sarpedon). Knossos must have been one extremely powerful and influential city-state during the reign of Minos.

Regarding the Phoenicians, there is some historical evidence that the Phoenicians began to send out their people westward to colonize foreign lands sometime after 1,000 B.C.E. Excavations on the south coast of Crete suggest that Phoenicians stopped there

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around 800 B.C.E. [11]. One outstanding question is whether Phoenicians or their predecessors (other West Semitic speakers) sent colonists westward also into the Aegean Sea from the Levant prior to 1,000 B.C.E. Phoenicians had the ability to settle among the Aegean Islands prior to 1000 B.C.E. but did they? It seems less likely during Mycenaean times because the Phoenician city states (Sidon, Tyre) were defending themselves from attacks by people originating in the Aegean Islands and Crete.

So the timeline can be used to identify an approximate time when certain non-Greek speaking people lived on the Aegean Islands as well as on Crete.

The timeline can also be used to bring some continuity to other stories.

Herodotus begins his *Histories* by describing some ancient conflicts between the Asians and the Greeks which eventually lead to the invasion of Greek territory by the Persians. Herodotus was born at Halicarnassus in Caria and was about 10 years old when this invasion was made. He writes:

"Learned Persians put the responsibility for the quarrel on the Phoenicians. These people came originally from the so called Red Sea; and as soon as they had penetrated to the Mediterranean and settled in the country where they are to-day, they took to making long trading voyages. Loaded with Egyptian and Assyrian goods, they called at various places along the coast, including Argos, in those days the most important place in the land, now called Hellas.

"Here in Argos they displayed their wares, and five or six days later when they were sold out, a number of women came down to the beach to see the fair. Amongst these was the king's daughter, whom Greek and Persian writers agree in calling Io, daughter of Inachus...The greater number got away; but Io and some others were caught and bundled aboard the ship, which cleared at once and made off for Egypt...

"Later on some Greeks, whose name the Persians fail to record -- they were probably Cretans -- put into the Phoenician port of Tyre and carried off the king's daughter Europa, thus giving them tit for tat.

"For the next outrage it was the Greeks again who were responsible. They sailed in an armed merchantman to Aea in Colchis on the river Phasis, and, not content with the regular business which had brought them there, they abducted the king's daughter Medea...

"The accounts go on to say that some forty or fifty years afterwards, Paris, the son of Priam, was inspired by these stories to steal a wife for himself out of Greece, being confident that he would not have to pay for the venture any more than the Greeks had done. And that was how he came to carry off Helen..." [12]

Herodotus's story suggests that the abduction of Medea occurred in 1260 to 1270 B.C.E. (forty or fifty before Paris abducted Helen). This Medea may be the same Medea who was resident in the household of Theseus' father, Aegeus, when Theseus arrived in Athens. Theseus arrived in Athens after the 2nd Athenian Tribute (circa 1274 B.C.E.) but before the 3rd Athenian Tribute (circa 1265 B.C.E.). The hypothetical timeline above generally agrees with Herodotus' account. Medea was in Athens some 40 to 50 years
before the Trojan War, but the timeline would suggest that Medea was abducted maybe 10 to 20 years before her arrival in Athens. So, the timeline suggests that the voyage of the Argo when Medea was abducted occurred sometime in the quarter century 1300 to 1275 B.C.E.

The timeline casts doubt on those ancient writers who contend that Theseus was a member of the crew of the Argo. Theseus would have been a baby or a young child at the time of the voyage of the Argos. The ancient writers agree that Theseus was a young man barely out of his teens when he reaches Athens (he has to be young to become a member of the 3rd Athenian Tribute) where he encounters Medea. For Medea, Athens is the last place on her journey; she formerly resided in Corinth and Thebes. One can only conclude that Medea was abducted many years before reaching Athens.

The two genealogies concerning the lineage of Minos above agree that the mother of a Minos was Europa, and that she was a Phoenician princess (a non Mycenaean Greek). There is some disagreement whether she was from Sidon or Tyre. According to Herodotus' sequence of events, the abduction of Europa by Cretans occurred sometime prior to Medea's abduction (maybe sometime in the period 1275 to 1300 B.C.E.). If Europa's son, Minos, was born circa 1325 B.C.E., then the hypothetical dateline would suggest that Europa's abduction occurred before that -- maybe between 1335 and 1325 B.C.E.

So, when did the Phoenicians abduct Io? Probably sometime before 1335 B.C.E. or more likely in the period 1350 to 1400 B.C.E.

Herodotus' account as described above seems to be consistent. It lends credence to the perception that there was a two way interaction between Phoenician traders doing business in Argos and Greek traders doing business in Tyre in the time prior to 1300 B.C.E. However, one can also infer from Herodotus' description that Phoenicians were only transients in Argos and Greeks were transients in Tyre.

5. Conclusions.--The following conclusions can be made:

One, the most famous people mentioned above (Theseus, Helen of Troy, King Minos of Knossos, Dadaelus) seemed to have lived in the 100 years prior to the Trojan War. Some messaging of the chronology based on other assumptions could narrow this down to 80 years before the Trojan War. One can conclude that they all lived sometime in the 13th Century B.C.E. (1200-1299 B.C.E.).

Two, the Trojan War could not have occurred much later than the 10 year period 1220 to 1210 B.C.E. because the major Mycenaean centers were destroyed or abandoned by the 1200 to 1180 B.C.E. time period.

Three, the hypothetical timeline above also indicates that the Cretans led by Knossos had an aggressive militaristic foreign policy during the 13th Century B.C.E. Example one, Minos sent an expeditionary force to attack Athens to seek revenge over the death of
his son. Example two, Minos sent an expeditionary force to Sicily in pursuit of a fleeing Daedalus. Example three, Cretans were one contingent of an expeditionary force sent to attack Troy seeking the return of Helen of Troy. Minos did not build his fleet for defensive purposes -- to stop an invasion of Crete, for example; he built his fleet to exert his will overseas -- for offensive operations. Minos built his fleet to evict the malefactors from the islands; eviction is not a passive activity.

Four, the territory ruled by Knossos does not seem to have a homogeneous population. There were Greek speaking residents living within it. There were also non-Greek speaking residents, like the Carians and the Leleges, also living within it.

Five, it is also difficult to believe that the Minoans were a powerful political force after 1450 B.C.E. The Minoans may have permanently lost political and military control over a substantial part of the Crete when the first Mycenaean king came to power at Knossos (around 1450 B.C.E.). Prior to 1450 B.C.E. different areas of Crete were probably ruled from decentralized regional administrative centers (the palaces) with Knossos being the most powerful of them. Some of these regional centers were ruled by Minoans (whoever they were). Maybe other regional centers were ruled by non-Minoans. For example, Mycenaean Greeks may have ruled Khania at the same time that Minoans still ruled Knossos.

Six, it is difficult to believe that King Minos of Knossos is anything but a Mycenaean Greek-speaking king. The documents found at Knossos dating to the period after 1450 BCE are all written in Mycenaean Greek. They seem to indicate that the administrators at Knossos were Mycenaean Greeks until Knossos was destroyed around 1200 BCE. So, Mycenaean Greeks ruled central Crete from Knossos [13]. Though the administration at Knossos changed (from Minoan to Mycenaean), other non-Greek speaking peoples (the original Minoans, Carians, Leleges, and others) may have continued to live on territories ruled from Knossos.

All of these conclusions point to one central theme: that the ethnography of the Aegean Islands and Crete during Mycenaean times was very fluid and very complicated as some people moved out and some other people moved in. The one conclusion that predominates is that the Mycenaean Greeks were not the sole inhabitants. Unlike today, in Mycenaean times (3,300 years ago) the Aegean Islands and Crete were not inhabited by a homogeneous population but by both Greek and non-Greek speaking people.

[13] Chadwick, John. *The Mycenaean World*, pp. 50-60. Based on the Linear B tablets, Prof. Chadwick suggests that Knossos ruled the central part of Crete from Knossos. The eastend and westend of Crete were geographically inaccessible and rule from Knossos may have been more limited.

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