



*"...I also believe that in changing the census perhaps we should first draft a declaration of identity that includes all our people; explaining what we mean when we use the term ASSYRIAN."*

*Sargon Donabad*

**TOPICS:**

- What is an Assyrian?
- What does it mean to be an Assyrian?

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*snail-mail:* P.O. BOX 948 Merlynston, Vic. 3058. Australia.

If you have an opinion on the issue of identity write in via snail mail or e-mail, and have your say. Writers can choose to remain anonymous.

myself to other Assyrians. Hopefully this notion will become clearer through this article.

Some people believe that because we don't have a country, our identity is not so valid. But this is not so true. To establish an identity all you need is history, which is much less than what is needed to establish a nation. The history that is needed is not the ancient history that we have squeezed every bit of worth out of; I am referring to ancestral history, as in parents, grandparents, and so on. They were Assyrians; descendants of Assyrians, and that makes me an Assyrian as well.

Identity is not like a car, or clothing. The concept of it does not really involve our ability to choose, so we can not change it. We are born into an identity, and this for some has turned into the worst event of their existence. Many Assyrians around the

world are being persecuted, and face many problems through their daily life just because of their identity.

So, what should that mean to me?

Well, I personally don't believe in fate, I see

*Continued page 5*

# I.D

What do I actually mean when I state: "I am an Assyrian." This statement holds only one literal meaning, which is: "I belong to a group of people who are titled the Assyrians." As hard as I looked into it, I was unable to find any more meaning to the statement. But then I realised that I am looking

for the wrong things. When I state: "I am an Assyrian" I am not differing myself from people of other identities the same way I would distinguish myself from other species when I state: "I am a *Homo sapien*." What I'm actually doing, is going further than just disclosing my identity I am relating

## Towering Babylon

Page 7



The modest year 9 Syriac class: Mariam - 14, Hormis - 15, Ninawa - 14.

*Full report on page 4*

## School Talk

### St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox College

## **BOMBS DROPPED ON MOSUL AS SADDAM CELEBRATES BIRTHDAY**

(ZNAF: Baghdad) Saddam Hussein marked his 62nd birthday with soccer games and the erection of his life-size statues in Baghdad and Tikrit. A hundred and fifty Russians, as well as two Armenian football teams, were in Iraq for a sports extravaganza centered at the People's Stadium. New portraits of the man who wishes to be known as the "modern-day Nebuchadnezzar" and "grandson of Imam Hussein", are being added to the already ubiquitous giant paintings which adorn the capital.

The sanctions-struck people of Iraq also marked Saddam Hussein's day with the unveiling of the 10-million-dollar al-Azim (greatest) dam on a tributary of the Tigris River. The dam was inaugurated last Wednesday at 5 p.m. (1300 GMT), marking the very hour of Saddam's

birthday in Tikrit. The structure will irrigate vast tracts of land, help generate electricity and stop the Tigris flooding in Baghdad. Among other events to celebrate Saddam's birthday, were the unveiling of a full-sized statue of the president in a Chaldean church on Baghdad's al-Jumhuriya street. Saddam has decreed that one new mosque be built and the foundation stone laid for another every year to mark his birthday. Last week, five new mosques were opened- four in Baghdad, a fifth in the northern Salaheddin province.

## **MIDEAST CHRISTIANS SUPPORT SERBS AGAINST KOSOVARs**

Excerpts from a report by Patrick Goodenough, CNS Jerusalem Bureau Chief. (ZNCs: Jerusalem) As NATO forces continue to bombard Yugoslavia, ethnic Christian minorities in the Middle East have come out in concerted support of the Serbs, whom they see as victims of expansionist Islam. Organizations representing ancient Christian communities in Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan and Iraq – some based in the region, others in exile in the West – have issued statements slamming the West for siding against "Christian Serbia."

Christian minorities in the Middle East say they feel an affinity to the Serbs. Claiming

historical repression by Islamic regimes and compatriots, many ethnic Christians in the Middle East regard Muslims with fear and distrust.

## **UNVEILING OF THE ASHURBANIPAL BUST AND SCHOLARSHIP PARTY**

By Elki Essa reporting for ZENDA Magazine (ZND: Chicago) The unveiling of the Ashurbanipal bust took place at California State University, Stanislaus on Saturday, April 24, 1999. The bust, designed by renowned Assyrian artist Fred Parhad, was donated to the university by Narsai David, a well-known chef and Food and Wine Editor at

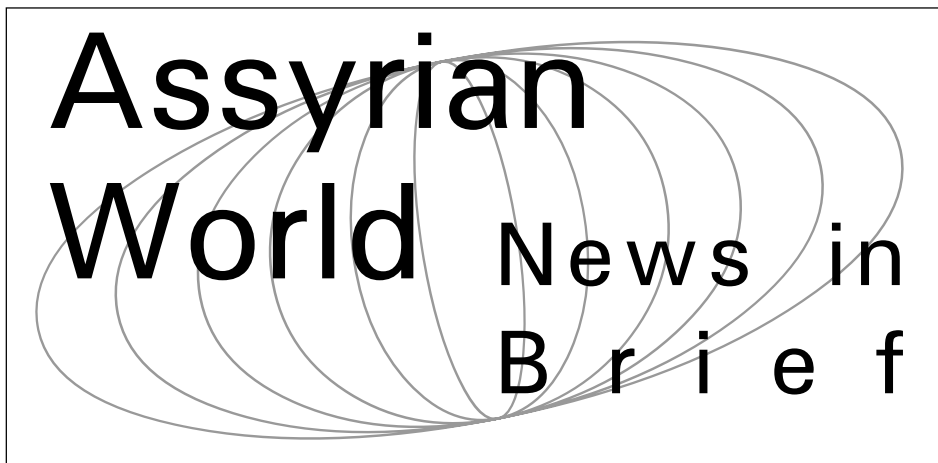
their certificates, as were this years CSU, Stanislaus graduates. Ashor Farhadi and the Generation X Band performed to the delight of everyone. The students' fund-raising efforts resulted in over \$2,000 raised for the Narsai David Scholarship Fund.

## **DROUGHT IN NORTHERN BETHNAHRAIN**

Courtesy of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: David Nissman, reporter.

(ZNRf: Prague) A severe drought in northern Iraq is forcing the people to leave their towns and villages. According to a statement by the Patriotic Union of

Kurdistan the drying up of wells and the sharp drop in water levels of small rivers and streams is affecting hydroelectric power production by the Dokan and Darbandikhan power facilities. The Iraqi Ministry of Humanitarian Aid and Cooperation recently issued an



KCBS in San Francisco. Mr. David is also the President of the Assyrian Aid Society of America. The unveiling was coordinated by the University's Development Office.

Dr. Walter Strong, Vice President of Development and University Relations, welcomed the guests and gave a brief presentation on the importance of the Assyrian community in California's Central Valley.

He was followed by Dr. Richard Curry, Provost at CSU, Stanislaus, who also commented on the achievements of the Assyrians, both past and present.

The bust is located in the lobby of the University's Library, a high-traffic location that is home to many of the University's administrators, including the President.

Ashurbanipal's sculpture is the first thing which comes to view when walking through the Library's front doors and will be a permanent fixture for future students to appreciate.

The unveiling was followed by the Assyrian Students Association Scholarship/Dinner Party at the Assyrian-American Civic Club. The party is given annually to raise funds for the Narsai David Scholarship Fund, which benefits Assyrian students at CSU, Stanislaus. Last year's award recipients — Anna Esho, Edessa Kandy, Rowchelle Julian and Sabrina Eshaghi — were presented with

appeal for outside assistance in order to limit the effects of the drought.

## **STOLEN ASSYRIAN RELIEF LOCATED IN LONDON**

(ZNMV: London) A 7th century BC alabaster relief from the Palace of Sennacherib depicting prisoners of war towing a boat, currently in the possession of a noted London collector, appears to be the same piece that Dr. John M. Russell photographed at Nineveh in 1989.

The collector acquired it in Geneva and then legally imported it into England. He later applied for an export license to loan the relief to a museum in Israel. The museum contacted Dr. Russell, a professor at the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston and a specialist in Mesopotamian art who had photographed all of the reliefs in situ at Nineveh in 1989. Following the confirmation of the theft the sixty-centimetre square relief, the Metropolitan Police were informed at the loss by Dr. Russell.

The collector's solicitor is currently protesting the legal action being taken by the Iraqi to recover the relief, since he had acquired it in good faith.

The International Review of Ancient Art & Archaeology, January/February 1999

# SYRIAC ON DISPLAY

Deeply ingrained in AYGV's constitution is the preservation of the Assyrian language, culture, and heritage, and as such, AYGV, strives wherever, and whenever possible to meet these objectives.

AYGV believes most vehemently that an integral part of culture is language, and as such, it stands to reason that the preservation of the Assyrian language, is a first step to the preservation of the Assyrian culture.

Living in an era where we find ourselves knocking at the gates of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it becomes almost a duty to utilise most appreciatively the tools of this age; such as, and especially computers, that make the task of teaching the Assyrian language, not only easier, but a little less labour intensive.

Ebbing from his endless reservoir of ideas, David Chibo, made it known to myself that he had an idea of creating a West Assyrian font. After consulting with Fr. Toma Issa of Adelaide (whom we thank most sincerely for his continued support of AYGV), and myself, about the finer details of the West Assyrian (Syriac) script, and vowel system; David undertook the undoubtedly arduous tasks of this mission.

Five months on, David has come out with a product that he is to be commended for, utilising the user-friendly features of Windows to come up with a West Assyrian font

Subsequently, the font will be released on the Internet, free of charge, for all Assyrians - a first in



Assyrian history.

It was also decided that it would be fitting if there were a public display of this software, within the Assyrian community. After all, it is for the benefit of the Assyrian community that such tasks are undertaken.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, a public display, and tutorial session was held in the halls of St. Aphrem Syrian Orthodox Church. The event was deemed to be a major success. On the Day, the young and the young at heart, alike, gathered round the two computers stationed in the halls, where they got a first hand appraisal of the font. All were genuinely enthusiastic about the font, and were impressed by its features. Moreover, copies of the font were given out, free of charge, for all to use. ■

## FIRST STEP

On Sunday the 30th of May, after the morning mass, parishioners of the St. George Assyrian Church of the East were invited to the site of the planned Reception Centre/School/Church complex. The official laying of the foundation was conducted during a small ceremony.

On the site of the Reception Centre/School/Church complex a tent was erected, along with tables and chairs, where 250 parishioners gathered to help participate in laying the foundation. Parishioners eagerly came forward to have the privilege of laying the foundation for one of the biggest projects ever conducted by the Assyrian-Australian community.

Building of the first stage of the complex - the construction of the Reception Centre/School

- is due to begin around July 1999. The current church committee is due for re-election, and after the new committee is finalised, the planning stage of the Reception Centre/School will be completed, and an official starting date of construction will be given. The design for the complex is currently being prepared by an Assyrian architect from Sydney, and is around 80% complete.

The current fundraising stage of the project has seen the collection of money needed to build the complex. The cost of the five star Reception Centre/School is itself anticipated to be around \$1,000,000 AU, most of which will be contributed by church members.

The committee anticipates the completion of the first stage around the end of the year 2000. ■

David Chibo

## editor's note

In last month's editorial I made some comments which have caused some anxiety to a number of people. I was questioned by those people, and I received a bit of flak over my comments. I am not sure of it, but I gather that the point I was trying to make was missed.

What I was trying to convey is that we are part of the world that surrounds us. Over time we have been building thicker shells around us, and to a certain degree we have isolated ourselves from other cultures, and societies. Today, as we are thrown into a melting pot of western cultures, we are hurt as these shells begin to crack open, ultimately losing ourselves in the scheme of things.

But the main idea was self-understanding. There is no denial that we are facing a bleak future if we continue to walk down this path. I never said that there is no future at all. We just need to understand our place in today's world, understand our problems, and then we maybe able to start building a future for Assyrians. But the building of this future is not only in the hands of our community groups; the first stones to be laid should be in our understanding as individuals.

Some new statistics coming out of Iraq have added to the many problems we face. Due to the number of Assyrian males that have left Iraq; there are eight females to every male. This means that seventy percent of Assyrian females will not have a chance to meet a husband. Also, on average, everyday one Assyrian female is converting to Islam, by marrying a Muslim.

There is also the problem of education, with more than sixty percent of children and youth unable to obtain any. But the problems are bigger for infants, and young children who don't have adequate food, and care.

Such facts really take their toll on your self-esteem. I can not but help feel responsible for what Assyrians in that part of the world are putting up with. But I don't mean responsible in the sense that I have somehow caused these problems, but in the sense that I am not doing enough for these people. ■

Sennacherib Warda

# MORE SCHOOL TALK & PICS



St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox College is situated in Coolaroo. It is a private school, which offers Coptic studies as part of its curriculum. Approximately four years ago Syriac studies were introduced due to the high number of Syriac speakers - of the 550 students enrolled at the school, 150 of them speak it.

The course works in this manner. When students have a lesson in Coptic studies, which teaches the Arabic language, Syriac speakers attend a different class, which covers the Syriac language. There are sixteen classes in all; they range from classes of 3 to 11 students in each. All classes are taught by Aziz Mrad, who is well versed in the language. His command of the language was strengthened by the language studies he undertook to obtain his Bachelor of Arts.

Being a relatively new subject, the curriculum is still under development. The studies start at Grade-2 but go right through

to year twelve. Students are taught to recognise the three different forms that the language is written in (Eastern, Western, and Estrangelo), and the two different dialects that are spoken (Eastern, and Western). Most of the classes are in the early stages of the language studies. As the students who are currently in the early grades develop their skills over the coming years, the curriculum will move from basic study programs into grammar, and other aspects of language studies.

While I was at the school, I had the pleasure of joining a modest year nine class (which consisted of three students). During the lesson a small test was conducted to gauge the students' ability to recognise words and letters, and understand tasks that were relayed to them in Syriac. Then the students were asked to read parts from a book that were written in the eastern dialect. Most of the classes are run in a similar fashion, the

main objective is to help students to recognise and read the different written forms of the language, and expand their vocabulary, understanding and usage of the language.

As for the students - it was an interesting sight seeing so many Syriac speakers in the one place. A fair number of them said that they stay together in groups which consist only of Syriac speakers, and I must admit that I sensed a closeness among those who gathered on the day I visited.

Some of the students commented that the studies were hard, while others said that it is easy and enjoyable. That could be due to their backgrounds with the language. Many of them speak the languages taught at home. While others attend weekend language schools.

All in all, it is a great effort that is undertaken in this project. For three years Mr. Mrad did the job voluntarily, but this year he has been granted a modest pay for his efforts.

Most importantly, at the end of the year, the student report includes accreditation for the Syriac studies undertaken. The studies are not yet accredited by the education department, however, this aspect is being worked on. But to have accreditation for the Syriac language on a school report is a big step for our language. And it also opens many doors for students who wish to move into language studies. ■ Sennacherib Warda



# Writing

Writing began in southern Mesopotamia, around 4000 BC, and was introduced and developed by the people known as the Sumerians. The Sumerians kept records of “how much” and “what kind”, by using small clay models of the item in question, and specific symbols for the numbers 1, 10, and 60. To safeguard a business transaction, these symbols were often sealed inside a hollow clay ball that archaeologists have called a *bullā*. To check the details of a transaction, it was necessary to crack open the *bullā*, and check its contents. In time, it became more efficient and feasible to use a pictograph script to depict the transaction of merchandise. Pictographic scripts cannot be considered writing, but it set the stage for the emergence of the first true form of writing.

From this period onwards writing underwent a transformation from pictographs to a system using syllables to express language. As writing continued to develop, the system of using syllables was developed to give greater precision. As early as the third millennium BC the scribes were being trained in scribal schools known as ‘tablet houses’. A number of buildings have recently been discovered which their excavators claim, from their layout and their presence of school tablets, can only be school rooms. This period witnessed the greatest period of Sumerian literary expansion, and today archaeologists have recovered over 5000 Sumerian literary tablets.

At about the same time that these changes in the cuneiform writing system were occurring, they were adopted by the Akkadians, Semitic invaders of Mesopotamia, for writing their language. The earliest Akkadian cuneiform inscriptions date from the Old Akkadian or Early Akkadian period (from 2450 to 1850 BC), during which the inscriptions of Sargon, the great ruler of Akkad, were written. Having conquered and absorbed the Sumerians, the Sumerian language was adapted for writing

the Akkadian language, of which Babylonian and Assyrian are dialects. Akkadian, the language of later inhabitants of Sumer, became the language of international communication. It was studied in schools throughout the ancient Middle East, and the use of cuneiform spread to Asia Minor, Syria, Persia, and, for diplomatic correspondence, to Egypt.

Writing, was considered a gift from the ancient gods. The ancient Assyrians and Babylonians held writing in such high regard that they designated one of their major gods specifically to the craft. The god of writing was called Nabu, the scribe, and herald of the gods. Writing was so sacred to the ancient people of Mesopotamia that Nabu’s cult status eventually rivaled that of his father, the chief Babylonian deity, Marduk, in popularity. Writers were also highly regarded, and the scribal art, in ancient

times was respected like no other profession. According to

ancient customs it was decreed by the god Enlil that a man should follow his father’s profession and become a scribe.

The development of writing marks a unique change in the history of mankind. Civilisation itself only developed after a system of laws and government was able to effectively communicate and manage the affairs of state. This communication could only be efficiently passed down through the written word, which was first etched on clay

by the Sumerians and later adopted

by the Akkadians and Babylonians, reaching its zenith under the Assyrians and their ancient empire. The ancient Mesopotamians, above all, have left us a legacy of literacy that has been adopted by the world today. Writing. A great milestone on the path to human civilisation, was first created by our ancestors over 6,000 years ago. ■

*David Chibo*

#### References

- The Origins Of Writing - Wayne Senner, 1989, pp5-7
- The Atlas of the Ancient World - Margaret Oliphant, 1992, p18
- Reading The Past - J.T.Hooker, 1990, pp36-46



*Photo courtesy Nineveh Gallery*

## THE ORACLE OF ISHTAR

Ashurhaddon, king of the land, fears nothing!  
The wind that blows against you,  
Have I not broken its wings?  
Your enemies everywhere will fall at your feet.

I am Ishtar of Arbela,  
O Ashurhaddon, king of Assyria!  
In the cities of Ashur, of Nineveh, of Kalah,  
and of Arbela,  
I shall give to Ashurhaddon, my king,  
Long days and eternal nights.

*Labat et al; Les Religions du Proche-Orient (p.257)*

# Tower of Babylon

There are a number of soccer clubs within our community that are dispersed throughout the different leagues, and competitions that are held throughout Victoria. Tower of Babylon is one of the distinguished soccer clubs within our community. The Club was established in 1994, and with the experience it has gained over the past few years, it has worked its way into the Division One Amateur league, where it is competing this year. Last year the club finished on top of the ladder of the league

they were involved in.

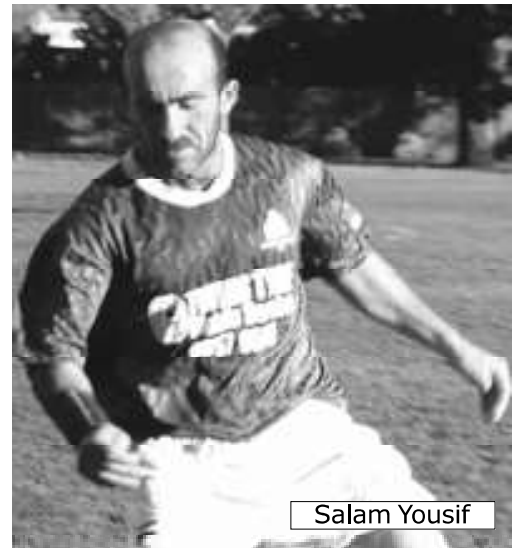
The Club consists of two teams, seniors, and reserves. You can catch the teams on training nights, which are held on Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

After eight rounds, the seniors are seventh on the league ladder, while the reserves are ninth.

The seniors have had a reasonable run this season, winning three, and drawing three of their matches. They have also had two unfortunate losses.



Tony Shamana



Salam Yousif

The club's home-ground is at Hallam reserve, which is situated on Boundary road in Glenroy. It is a fully equipped home-ground, with all the facilities needed by the players, and the Tower of Babylon as a club.

Like other clubs, Tower of Babylon is in need of sponsorship. By obtaining sponsors they would be able to expand, and tackle new projects. But sponsors look for numbers of crowds that attend the club's matches.

The players, on the other hand, play purely for the love of the sport, and are thrilled at the support that the small, but vocal, group of fans that attend their games provide for them.■

*Sennacherib Warda*

## Next four rounds

### Moreland United Vs.

- Round 12 - Sunday, 27th June 1999  
 - **Old Camberwell Grammar** 1:00/3:00pm  
 Moomba Park Reserve, Fawkner (Mel. Ref. 8 A-12)
- Round 13 - Sunday, 4th July 1999  
 - **Beaumaris** 1:00/3:00pm  
 Beaumaris Reserve, Beaumaris (Mel. Ref. 86 D-6)
- Round 14 - Sunday, 11th July 1999  
 - **Parkmore** 1:00/3:00pm  
 Moomba Park Reserve, Fawkner (Mel. Ref. 8 A-12)
- Round 15 - Sunday, 18th July 1999  
 - **Ivanhoe United** 1:00/3:00pm  
 Fairbairn Park, Ascot Vale (Mel. Ref. 28 C-8)

### Tower of Babylon Vs.

- Round 11 - Sunday, 27th June 1999  
 - **Kensington City** 3:00pm  
 Hallam Reserve, Pasco Vale (Mel. Ref. 17 D-6)
- Round 12 - Sunday, 4th July 1999  
 - **Epping City** 3:00pm  
 Duffy Reserve, Epping (Mel. Ref. 182 A-9)
- Round 13 - Sunday, 11th July 1999  
 - **South Port United** 3:00pm  
 Hallam Reserve, Pasco Vale (Mel. Ref. 17 D-6)
- Round 14 - Sunday, 18th July 1999  
 - **Middle Park** 3:00pm  
 Oval 16, Aughtie Drive, Albert Park. (Mel. Ref. 2K H-11)



The Assyrian Youth Group of Victoria is a non-political, non-religious and non-profit organisation.

It seeks to promote the Assyrian culture, history and language, as well as the Assyrian name and community, bringing it to the world stage.

It does this by supporting all artistic and social activities run by the youth of the Assyrian community.

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knowledgeable.....yadooaa.....ܝܕܘܘܘܐ	beauty.....shopra.....ܫܘܦܪܐ
specialty.....do-yala.....ܕܘܝܐܠܐ	bride.....kallo.....ܟܠܠܐ
translation.....targamta.....ܬܪܓܡܬܐ	bridegroom.....khetna.....ܟܗܬܢܐ
world.....te-wel.....ܬܝܘܘܠܐ	kingdom.....malkota.....ܡܠܟܘܬܐ
responsibility.....mashtalnota.....ܡܫܬܠܢܘܬܐ	speech.....mamlla.....ܡܡܠܠܐ
thought.....renea.....ܪܝܢܐܐ	menstruation.....msayta.....ܡܫܝܬܐ
mature.....gmera.....ܓܡܪܐ	resource.....maboa.....ܡܒܘܐܐ
nations.....aem-wata.....ܐܝܡܘܘܬܐ	attention.....no-waha.....ܢܘܘܗܐ
redemption.....shoqana.....ܫܘܩܢܐ	custom.....aayada.....ܐܝܝܕܐ
famous.....mshamha.....ܡܫܫܡܗܐ	fit.....pshatda.....ܦܫܬܕܐ
calm.....shetqa.....ܫܗܩܐ	identity.....hay-yaota.....ܗܝܝܘܬܐ
organisation.....shotasa.....ܫܘܬܐܫܐ	researcher.....bassoya.....ܒܫܘܝܐ



It is frightening, but the stories have happened. Every single one of us has been touched by the cruelty of war; if it were not myself, it was my partner, or my friend.

Almost every one of us has a story to tell. But for some reason we have kept it to ourselves.

War Stories is a collection of war accounts experienced by Assyrians. It is a much needed project, which will bring to surface modern atrocities experienced by Assyrians.

The scars of war have cut deep into our being - we need not hide them.

Send your story to:

e-mail: nakosha@hotmail.com - snail-mail: P.O. BOX 948 Merlynston, Vic. 3058. Australia.

Writers can choose to remain anonymous, if so, please supply gender, and age

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