



A PRELIMINARY RULING SEQUENCE OF COBÁ, QUINTANA ROO

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Introduction

The archaeological site of Cobá is located in the western part of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo near the border to Yucatán. Due to its impressive site center, about a dozen outlying major satellites connected by a causeways with the nuclear zone, and two long range *sakbe'ob* to Ixil and the 100 km distant center of Yaxuná, Cobá is believed to be one of the biggest Maya sites in the entire Maya lowlands. Based on the model of subzones proposed by Antonio Benavides (1981a: 23-24, 1981b: 185f.), esteems attribute Cobá an urban expansion of at least 70 km².

Research in the archaeological site was, among others, conducted by the Austrian explorer Teobert Maler (1997: 221-222), the Carnegie Institution of Washington (Gann 1926: 103-128, Thompson, Pollock and Charlot 1932, Villa Rojas 1934), the Coba Archaeological Mapping Project of the National Geographic Society (Folan, Kintz and Fletcher 1983), and the INAH (Benavides 1981a, 1981b) up to the present day (cf. José Con and Martínez Muriel 2002).

Epigraphy of Cobá

Up to the present day, 34 stelae and several panels with traces of hieroglyphic inscriptions have been unearthed, most of them have been published in the CMHI (Graham and van Euw 1997). Remains of painted texts upon stucco have also been uncovered. Since the prevailing majority of the monumental hieroglyphic records of Cobá have been carved on a local limestone of poor quality, the state of preservation is merely sufficient to regain valuable historical information. A great part of the calendrical accounts have nevertheless been discussed by Sylvanus G. Morley (1927) and above all by Eric Thompson (Thompson, Pollock and Charlot 1932). As for the non-calendrical contents, only very recently attempts have been made to retrieve information from the heavily eroded monuments of Cobá (cf. Lacadena 2003).

Aim of this note and methodology

Within this note, I will make the attempt to establish a preliminary dynastic sequence for Cobá. Unfortunately, no key expressions for the demarcation of distinctive rulers can definitely be made out in the texts, such as birth, inauguration or death. The

pioneering historic method first utilized by Tatiana Proskouriakoff (1960) fails in the corpus of Cobá due to the fragmentary state of well readable glyphic blocks. Even distance numbers can hardly be utilized to establish a source immanent calendric nexus.

The only possibility to get information on rulers in a relative dynastic sequence is to separate them by a sufficient gap in time. In a second step, monuments with nearby dates, preferably with a temporal overlapping, might be attributed to a single individual. Not until the clustering of monuments and their dates is achieved, the recognition of historical events can be used to crosscheck this grouping and to ensure that the acting protagonist is indeed a ruler. But this last step should not be overestimated. Again it has to be stressed that such recognitions have no strong affirmative character in the heavily eroded inscriptions.

With the aid of the methodology described, it was possible to pinpoint three distinctive rulers in the corpus of Cobá. In the following paragraphs these rulers, named consecutively by letters from A to C, will be presented by means of the retrieved information.

Ruler A

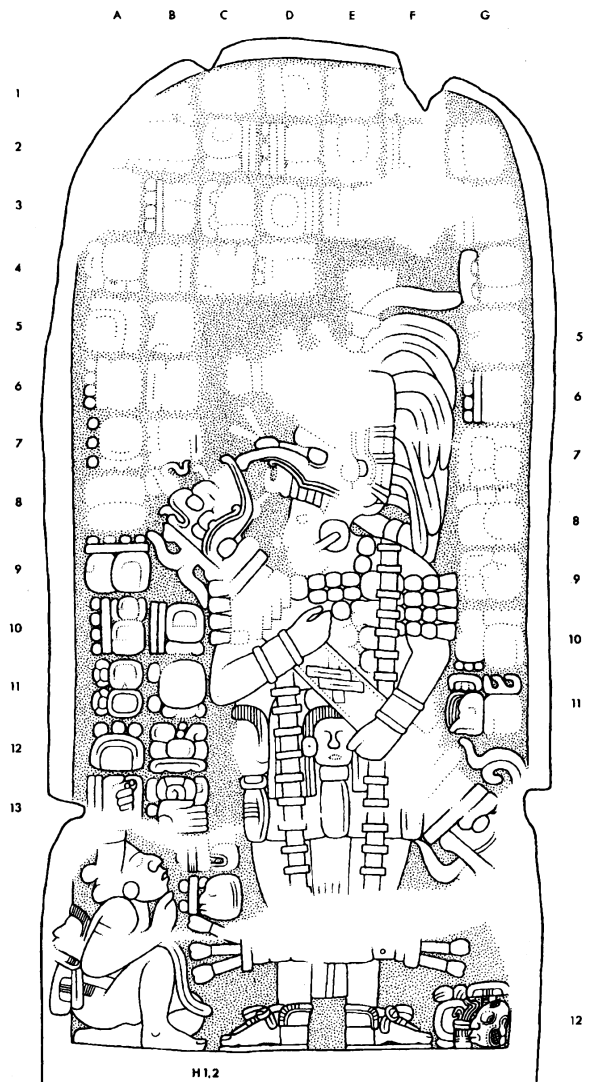


Figure 1: Cobá Stela 6. In: Graham and van Euw 1997: 37.

Stela 6 (Figure 1) opens in blocks A1-B7 with an Initial Series date 9.9.0.0.0, 3 Ajaw 2 Sotz' (May 12, 613). Without interruption, a second Initial Series follows directly behind in blocks A8-D2 and denotes the half-period 9.9.10.0.0, 2 Ajaw 13 Pohp (March 21, 623). At the end of the text, in blocks G11-G12 there can be made out a stative phrase.

G12 opens with a statement which apparently reads *u-mam*, "his grandfather" followed by the personal name of him, according to the general structure of relationship expressions. Ruler A as the subject of the texts must therefore be named in blocks G?-G10 and is surely depicted with the standing figure. Stela 4 (Figure 2) can also be connected to Ruler A, since it bears the same 9.9.10.0.0 date as Stela 6. There is a calendar round denoted in blocks I6-I7, followed by a verbal expression introducing the sign T713a *k'al* in I8. This verb is in most instances connected either with the inauguration of a ruler or period ending rituals. Since the combination of the numeral coefficients 4 and 17 in the calendar round do not allow a period ending with the day sign *ajaw*, a historical account is probably. This assumption finds further confirmation with

block I9 that highly resembles the outer shape of the prepositional expression *tu baah*. An accession into rulership is therefore highly plausible and may refer to Ruler A. Unfortunately, the calendar round cannot be fixed securely in the Long Count notation.

Ruler B

Separated by a time gap of 30 years, Stela 1 (Figure 3) has been identified as a testimony of the next individual, Ruler B. This monument bears a very long inscription on all four sides and incorporates four single Initial Series dates in a single inscription, a feature shared only with COB St. 5 in the Maya corpus.

The front side opens with the Initial Series date 9.11.0.5.9, 4 Muluk 17 K'ayab (January 31, 653) in blocks A1-B9. In blocks G7-H13 the date 9.12.10.5.12, 4 Eb 10 Yax (August 30, 682) appears. The back face of Stela 1 opens with one of the most remarkable Initial Series dates denoted on a Maya monument, the elaborate creation date 13.0.0.0.0, 4 Ajaw 8 Kumk'u (August 13, 3114 BC) in blocks M1-N17. Its 25 period denominations are followed in block M18 by the "creation verb" T153 and the period ending expression *tzutz* in block M19. The fourth Initial Series date appears in blocks O6-??, identifiable as 9.12.0.0.0, 10 Ajaw 8 Yaxk'in (July 1, 672).

No historical information may be retrieved for the non-mythical dates, since many parts of the inscription are eroded. Since it is obvious that the date 9.12.0.0.0 is denoted for the commemoration of the *K'atun*-ending, the other two dates 9.11.0.5.9 and 9.12.10.5.12 are of historic nature and must describe events in the life of Ruler B. The text might be structured in the following way with the aid of the Long Count dates. Of course I am aware that this interpretation is highly speculative, but at the same time of some plausibility. The first date 9.11.0.5.9 might be connected with the accession of Ruler B, who then celebrated the 12-*K'atun*-ending as ruler with a linkage to the creation event on

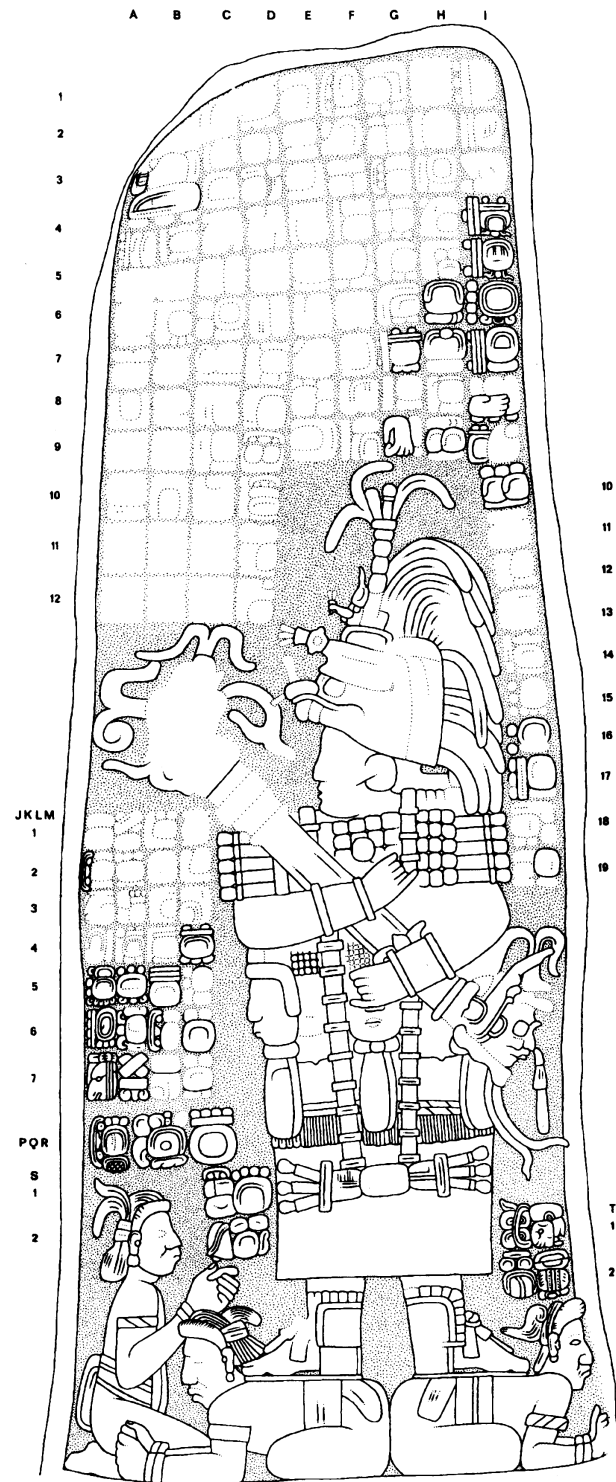


Figure 2: Cobá Stela 4. In: Graham and van Euw 1997: 31.

13.0.0.0.0. The last date, 9.12.10.5.12 might then describe an important event during his reign, eventually his death. If this should hold true, Ruler B would have been 29 years in office, not an untypical span. Since most inscriptions in Cobá open with a round date, this stela is seen as the tale of another individual.

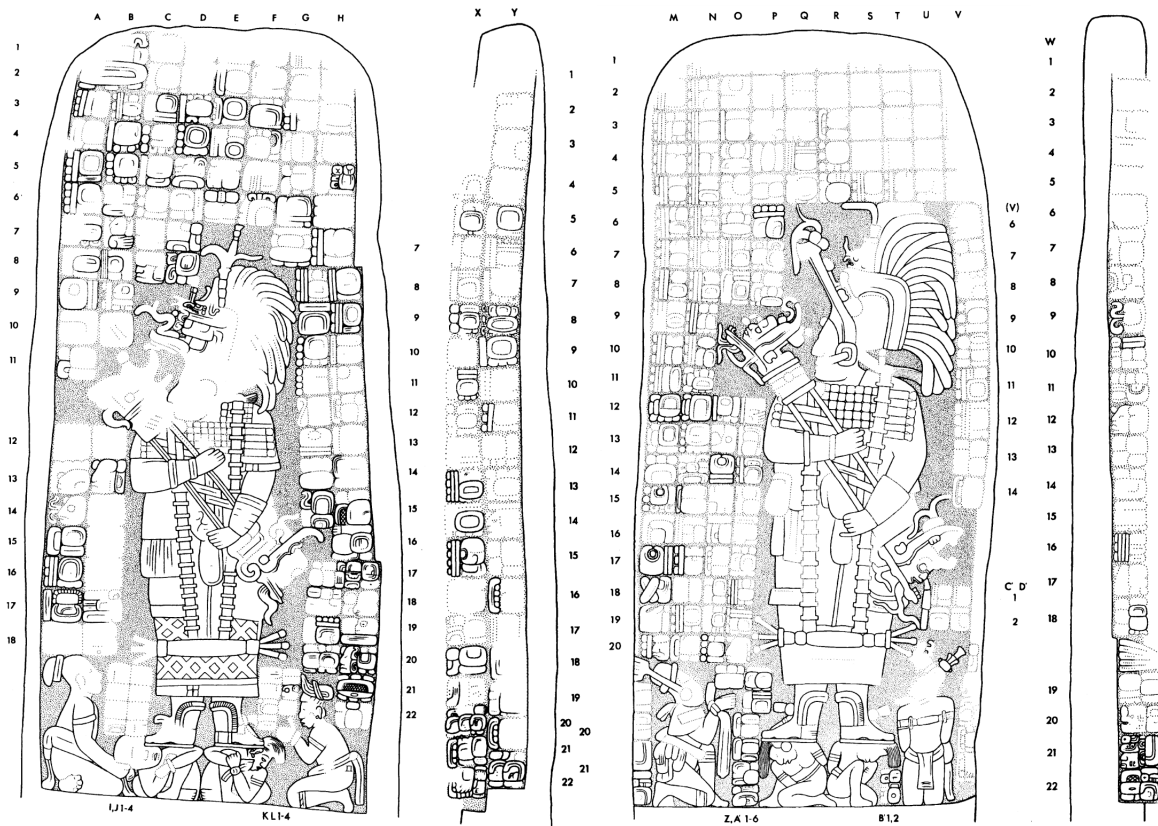


Figure 3: Cobá Stela 1. In: Graham and van Euw 1997: 18-24.

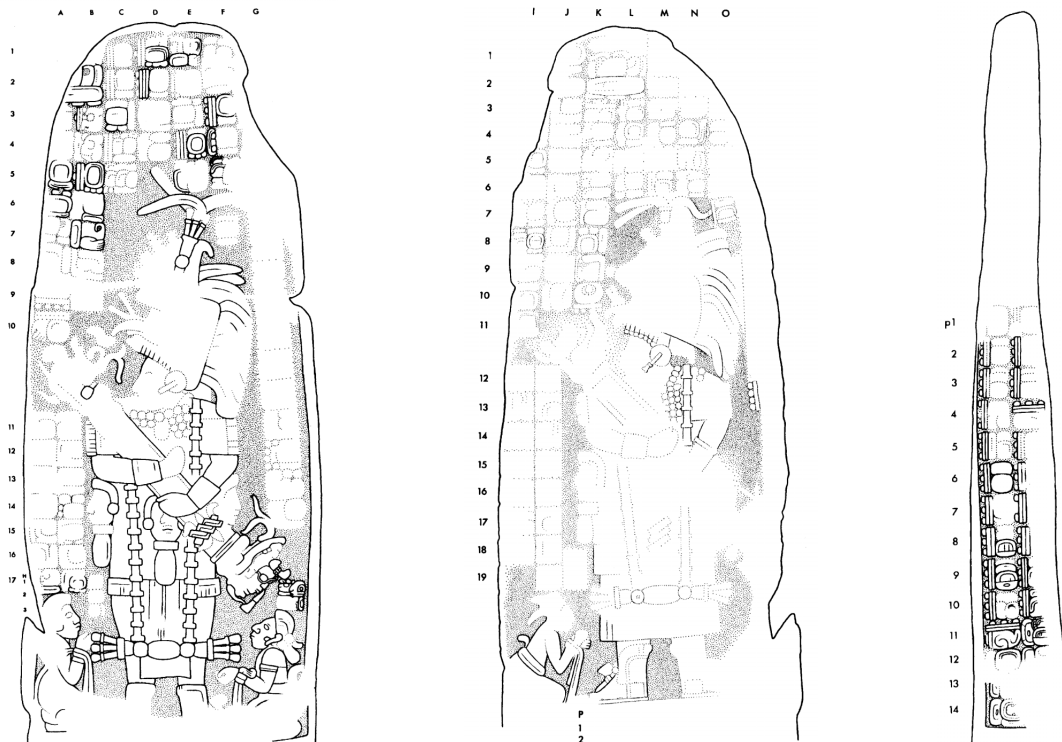


Figure 4: Cobá Stela 5. In: Graham and van Euw 1997: 33-36.

Stela 5 (Figure 4) is also of interest, since it also incorporates several Initial Series dates. The front side opens with the notation of 9.11.10.0.0, 11 Ajaw 18 Ch'een (August 23, 662) in blocks A1-B9. It is probable that the back face also opened with a Long Count date which cannot be determined. This side incorporates another date in blocks K2-K10 which can only be given as 9.11.?0.0, ? Ajaw ?? due to heavy erosion. Like on Stela 1, the right side of Stela 5 displays a long notation of the creation date 13.0.0.0.0. Since the dates of Stelae 1 and 5 overlap, the latter one can also be attributed to Ruler B.

Ruler C

Separated by a considerable gap in time of more than 100 years to the inscriptions of Ruler B, the next clear evidence comes from Stela 20 (Figure 5), the best preserved monument from Cobá.

The Initial Series date in blocks A2-D1 can clearly be identified as 9.17.10.0.0, 12 Ajaw 8 Pax (December 2, 780). Though the following text is eroded, it presumably described events in celebration of the *K'atun*-ending. Most interestingly, in block C7 the expression *u-kab-iji(y)* which introduces the agent of the events denoted, i.e. the ruler. His name phrase can therefore be made out safely in blocks E1-F1, though it is unknown if it extends further. An emblem glyph is also not visible. The signs are eroded, but considering the shape and outlines, a reading *kaloomte' chan k'inich* might be plausible.

Stela 16 (Figure 6) opens with an Initial Series for which Thompson (Thompson, Pollock and Charlott 1932) has proposed three possibilities: 9.15.1.2.8, 9 Lamat 16 Keej, 9.12.9.2.8, 9 Lamat 11 Yaxk'in or 9.11.3.2.8, 9 Lamat 1 K'ank'in. Based on the appearance of specific notations in the Supplementary Series and arithmetic considerations, I conclude the date is rather 9.16.7.2.8, 9 Lamat 6 Xul (May 20, 758). Considering the great time gap between the monuments of Ruler B and Ruler C, Stela 16 might also be attributed to the latter one and may then record his birth or inauguration.

Discussion

As demonstrated, it has been possible to identify three distinctive rulers in the inscriptions of Cobá. For one of them, Ruler C, a nominal phrase or at least a part of it could be isolated and read as *kaloomte' chan k'inich*. Personal affairs and stations in the biography of ruler are hardly to be determined, only fragmentary information, such as the celebration of period endings are seen or can be derived. In connection with Ruler A, an accession statement of the form *k'al-laj sak hu'n tu baah* was notified, but it cannot be correlated with a Long Count position.

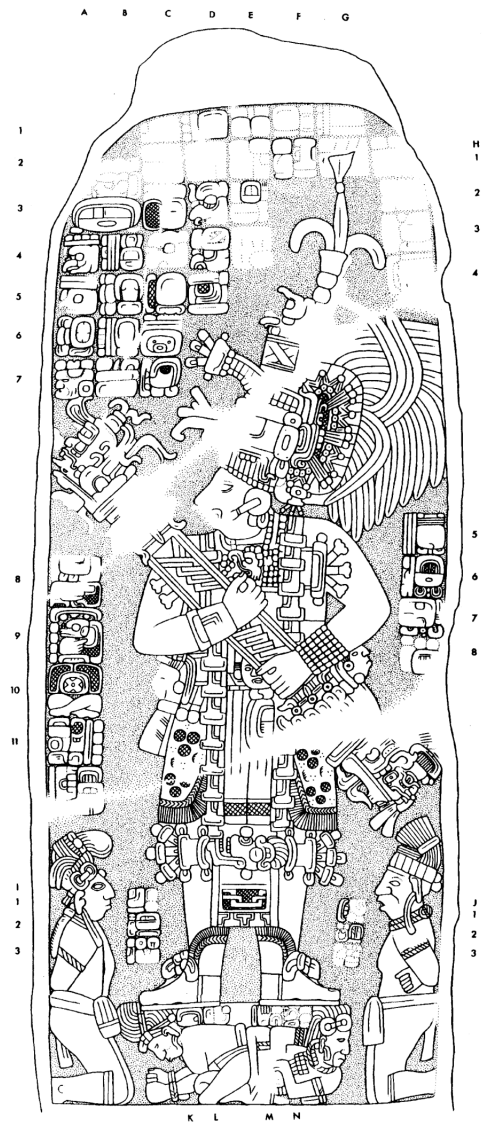


Figure 5: Cobá Stela 20. In: Graham and van Eeuw 1997: 60.

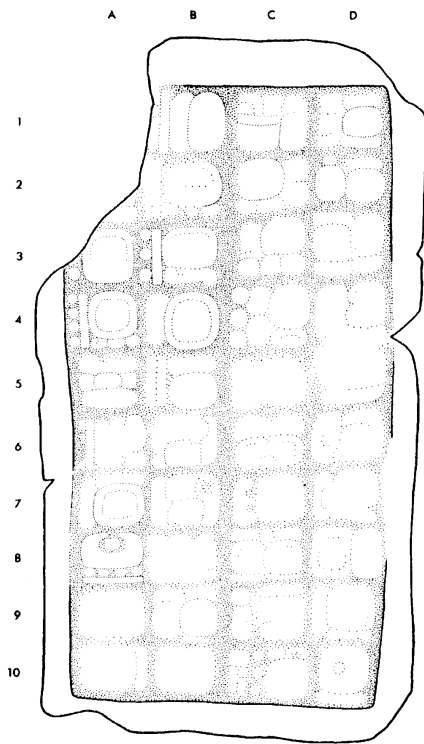


Figure 6: Cobá Stela 16. In: Graham and van Eeuw 1997: 53.

Unfortunately, the three identified rulers are also not in an uninterrupted dynastic sequence but separated by sometimes remarkable time gaps. Parentage statements that would help to identify successive individuals are absent. Though Stela 6 offers the relationship *u-mam*, it is not clear whether this mentioned grandfather was indeed a ruler, since his nominal phrase shows no titles that would identify him as such.

Like the internal history of Cobá, the sociopolitical interactions and relations with other polities remain obscure. No single event can be identified. There is nevertheless one clue that could shed more light into the political organization of Northeastern Yucatán. Several emblematic titles can be seen in the inscriptions. One of them, *ek'aab jo'* (Lacadena 2003) was proposed as the emblem of Cobá itself by Grube. It is possible to correlate the site with this emblem, but definite confirmation still needs to be found. As it was proposed by Lacadena, the mother of the Ek' Balam king *U Kit Kan Le'k Took'* may be from this place.

The interactions of Cobá and Ek' Balam as well with other polities of Northeastern Yucatán may also be derived from the mention of another emblem. It constitutes of the name of God K, *k'awiil*. On EKB Msc. 1, a person is depicted and named by a glyphic caption which ends in *k'awiil ajaw*. Lacadena (2003) has discussed this part either as a title or as a part of the personal name. That *k'awiil ajaw* is indeed an emblem glyph can be demonstrated by several more references in the corpus of Cobá, where it appears on Stela 1, H5. More examples combine it with the female personal classifier *ix(ik)* as it can be seen on Stela 1, H20 and W21. Possibly, a woman from the polity of *k'awiil* married into the Cobá dynasty and was somehow related to Ruler B. Since Ek' Balam carries its own emblem *tal(o')* (Voß and Eberl 1999), the polity of *k'awiil* may somewhere be located between or at the periphery of both centers. Yaxuná for example may be a good candidate, since it is also connected by a regional *sakbe* with Cobá.

Final remarks

The importance of Cobá as a regional capital on the Yucatán peninsula that was deduced from its sheer size in the archaeological record, finds only a limited confirmation by epigraphy. Though many stelae with quite long inscriptions are known, their badly preserved manner make it quite impossible to reconstruct a dynastic and political history. Maybe an even more closer inspection of the original texts might reveal another detail in the record. The small sketch presented in this note only summarizes the results of a quick glance.

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