



The *PEF* And Its Photographic Collection

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■ Background to the PEF

The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) is the oldest society in the world for the study and exploration of the southern Levant. It was inaugurated at a meeting attended by a handpicked group of 24 illustrious men in the Jerusalem Chamber at Westminster Abbey on 12 May 1865 (Jacobson 2016). They were not what one might consider as the expected quorum for such a gathering, which would have been a group of churchmen with an interest in the Land of the Bible. Rather, this special group was largely made up of eminent scientists, engineers and architects, as well as one of the leading clergymen of the day and considerable scholar in his own right, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, the Dean of Westminster. Others included Joseph Hooker (a great 19th century botanist), Richard Owen (an outstanding naturalist and palaeontologist), Roderick Murchison (a leading geologist), William Spottiswoode (a distinguished mathematician and physicist) and George Gilbert Scott (a famous Victorian architect). The main driving force behind the initiative for setting up the PEF was George Grove, who was an accomplished lighthouse engineer, musicologist, biblical scholar and close associate of Dean Stanley. Among his many significant accomplishments, he initiated the authoritative Grove Dictionary of Music, first published in 1878 and regularly updated and reissued up to the present time. It was the Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem of 1864-65, led by Captain Charles W. Wilson of the Royal Engineers that galvanised Grove and his circle to establish the PEF and pull out the stops to obtain the necessary funding to enable it to succeed in its far-sighted aims.

It is no wonder that at the public launch of the PEF in London on 22 June that year, the chairman, William Thomson, the Archbishop of York and renowned logician, articulated the sentiments of the founding fathers in stating that the new organisation would:

“vigorously adhere to this principle – that our object is strictly an inductive inquiry. We are not to be a religious society; we are not about to launch into any controversy; we are about to apply the rules of science, which are so well understood by us in our branches, to an investigation into the facts concerning the Holy Land” (*PEF Proceedings and Notes* 1, 1865, p. 3).

The appeal for funds met with an immediate response. Queen Victoria sent a donation of £150 and consented to become the Patron of the PEF. The decisions taken at that meeting marked out the course that the PEF was to follow, as enshrined in the original prospectus, issued on 1 October the same year, i.e. 1865 (*PEF Proceedings and Notes* 2,

1865, pp.2-5). Its activities in the field would encompass archaeological excavations, high precision surveying, and studies of the natural history, geology and ethnography of the Holy Land. Of these endeavours, it was generally agreed that a high priority must be given to the preparation of a complete and detailed survey map of Palestine. Archaeological excavations were also to loom large among PEF priorities to the satisfaction of those like Austin Henry Layard, the pioneering excavator of Nineveh and other ancient Assyrian sites, who joined the committee.

This scientific focus informed the activities of the PEF that followed, including Charles Warren's landmark explorations in Jerusalem from 1867 to 1870 (see Warren and Conder 1884) and its flagship project, the Survey of Western Palestine from 1872 to 1875, which were methodically executed and reported objectively, by the norms of the period. Following the First World War, and the establishment of the British Mandate for Palestine, the PEF resumed its work there, particularly in Jerusalem, with two important excavations being conducted in the 1920s, the first by Robert A. S. Macalister and J. Garrow Duncan and the second by John W. Crowfoot and George M. Fitzgerald.

From the outset, photography played a conspicuous role in PEF expeditions. Major General Sir Henry James the director-general of the Ordnance Survey, the British Government mapping agency, who oversaw the *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (Wilson 1866) appreciated the value of photography in surveying and mapping activities and in 1855 had created a photography department at the Ordnance Survey headquarters in Southampton, which was assigned its own building (Howe 2013). A set of more than 60 photographs of panoramic views and important landmarks taken by Sergeant James McDonald formed part of the *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* publication. The Corps of Royal Engineers espoused James' view of the importance of photography in field work and added photography to their training programme. It became the norm for a trained photographer to be included in PEF expeditions carried out by Royal Engineers.

■ The Picture Archives of the PEF

The PEF has amassed a rich collection of photographs, with approximately 7,000 dating from the 19th century. The earliest of these are from the 1850s, and include those taken by the missionary James Graham. From a decade later are series of photographs taken by Francis Bedford to record the places visited by the Prince of Wales during his tour of the Levant in 1862 and the exquisite pictures taken by Sergeant James McDonald for

the Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem in 1864-65. Other photographs of distinction are those of Captain Henry Phillips while attached to PEF expeditions in ensuing years. From the period of the British Mandate, the PEF possesses numerous photographs taken by Professor John Garstang, who was the first Director of the British Mandatory Department of Antiquities of Palestine. Other photographs in its collection are the work of private individuals who had some connection with the PEF and donated their pictures to its photographic archives. There are also a large number taken by commercial photographers, such as La Maison Bonfils, Robertson and Beato, Frank Mason Good, The American Colony, C. and G. Zangaki, Garabed Krikorian and Khalil Raad. Brief notes about the photographers featured in this article are provided in an appendix. Here it is worth mentioning that there are also some wonderful original watercolours of topographical and other subjects in the PEF's extensive picture collection, principally the sketches made in Jerusalem in 1869 by William 'Crimea' Simpson, a leading artist working for the Illustrated London News, and those by Claude R. Conder, from 1872 to 1874, while engaged on the Survey of Western Palestine which he led during those years.

Whereas the images taken by the 19th century commercial photographers tended to be aimed at the pietistic and tourist markets, the PEF collection mostly reflects the interests of those involved with the organisation during this period. Topographic views are particularly well represented, whereas there are relatively few photographs of religious shrines or tableaux of biblical 'scenes', with live models in 'authentic' dress, which then enjoyed popular appeal, and particularly to tourists. As one might expect from the PEF, a significant proportion of the photographs of Jerusalem (and elsewhere in the Holy Land) feature well-attested ancient sites, in particular the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and, for example, ancient remains at Samaria, which were the subject of considerable interest among PEF committee members and those involved in its exploration activities.

The very limited number of photographs of holy tombs and relics likewise reflects both the normal Protestant aversion towards such devotional objects, which was shared by most of those closely associated with the PEF, many of whom were members of the Church of England, and the scholarly scepticism shown towards shrines whose historical attestation was, at best, somewhat dubious and rarely long-standing. This is certainly true of the Tomb of David on Mt. Zion, which cannot be corroborated at the existing location before the Middle Ages.

The early savants of the PEF appreciated that they were on surer ground with landscape views of localities mentioned in the Bible. For most of the 400 years that Palestine was

under Ottoman rule, the country was largely neglected and until the latter decades of the 19th century Jerusalem and its environs appeared largely frozen in time, a veritable time capsule, and the early photographs attest to this.

One has to bear in mind that, in the 19th century, photography in the Levant was a considerable logistic feat, involving the transportation of bulky cameras together with bottles of chemicals and the heavy glass plates on which the negatives were developed, as well as a tent for use as a darkroom required for developing the plates. Travelling over rough paths and stony streets on donkeys with jars of sensitive chemicals and photographic equipment was fraught with risks. Yet some of the earliest photographs taken by the likes of James Graham and James McDonald working under those difficult conditions have rarely been surpassed. It is from such diverse sources that the PEF photographic archives have been assembled and continue to be augmented, and though our knowledge of the specific sites, their history and their archaeology has grown substantially since those early pioneering days, the images retain their special appeal and documentary value.

In this article, it is only possible to present a taster of the PEF holdings in its picture archives. A number of the photographs relate to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and several other important Christian holy places, which will not be dealt with here. The selection of just 14 photographs in this article afford us glimpses of Jerusalem before modern building development took hold and changed the city almost beyond recognition and highlight the inestimable historical and documentary importance of the PEF collection. Each caption gives the PEF archival reference number, and the name of the photographer is shown together with the date of the photograph in brackets. All these pictures are reproduced here courtesy of the Palestine Exploration Fund.

Figure 1: PEF/P/2191 (James Graham, 1858)

Panoramic view of the Old City of Jerusalem from Mount Scopus, as it appeared in the mid-19th century, prior to expansion of the town beyond the walls. Mount Scopus was the site of the main camp of the Roman legions during the siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE (Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.67–68).

Figure 2: PEF/P/2044 (Frank Mason Good, 1875)

View of the north-western slope of the Mount of Olives, showing the walled compound of the Garden of Gethsemane at its foot. It is a view captured before the construction of churches and other buildings covered this hillside.





Figure 3: PEF/P/2144 (James Graham, 1853–57)

A panoramic view towards Mount Zion, taken from above Job's Well (Bir 'Ayyub). The ruins of the structure that formerly covered the well are seen in the foreground. The Hinnom valley descends from the left, the Tyropoeon valley (largely filled-in with ancient debris and soil) is just discernible below the walls of the Old City towards the centre, and the Kidron valley emerges from the right. The photograph is marked with handwritten captions by the photographer.

Figure 4: PEF/P/4842; published as Photograph 36a in the *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (James McDonald, 1864-65)

View looking northwards up over the Ophel and the Kidron valley to the right, with the south-east corner of the Old City and the Temple Mount in the distance. The village of Silwan (Siloam) appears on the brow of the hill opposite to the right. Like Figure 3, it shows the area south of the Old City prior to the covering of this most ancient part of Jerusalem with dwellings.



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Figure 5: PEF/P/G1128 (John Garstang, 1923–25)

View from the south of the northern end of the filled-in Tyropoeon valley, within the walls of the Old City. The area, now occupied by the Western Wall plaza, was then covered by a large expanse of prickly pears. The Jewish Quarter is seen on the left and to the southern end of the Temple Mount on the right.



Figure 6: PEF/P/554 (Henry Phillips, 1867)

The eastern edge of the Jewish Quarter as it appeared in the 19th century. In view are old stone houses that overlooked the Tyropoeon valley and the Temple Mount. Its elevated position within the city gave this area, known as the Western Hill, a strategic advantage. In the Second Temple Period, aristocratic and high priestly families resided here, according to archaeological evidence, and it was the site of the Hasmonaean palace mentioned by Josephus (*Jewish War* 2.344; *Jewish Antiquities* 20.190). This was the last part of Jerusalem to fall to the Romans during the catastrophic siege that ended in 70 CE, and culminating in the destruction of the Temple.

Figure 7: PEF/P/G1164 (John Garstang, 1920s)

Excavations in progress on the Ophel by Robert Macalister and Garrow Duncan. At the top of the eastern slope of David's City is the 'stepped stone structure'. It buttresses the raised podium of what may have been an ancient citadel. This construction has been variously dated to between the 10th and 13th centuries BCE. Photographs like this of early excavations cast light on former methods used in archaeological investigations.



Figure 8: PEF/P/4427; published as Photograph 38a in the *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem* (James McDonald, 1864–65)

Monumental tombs at the foot of the Mount of Olives. From left to right: the Tomb of Absalom, the Tomb of Bene Hezir and the Tomb of Zechariah. Apart from recording the appearance over a century ago of these ancient monuments, this and related photographs also illustrate the extent of the old Jewish cemetery on the slopes of the Mount of Olives. Here it is seen that, at the time this photograph was taken, Jewish tombstones extended down to the bottom of the Kidron valley.

Figure 9: PEF/P/1787 (Francis Bedford, 1862)

View southwards, following the Kidron valley. Ancient rock-cut tombs can be discerned among the houses of Silwan village. In the left foreground the southern edge of the old Jewish Mount of Olives cemetery is visible. This is an early photographic record of the ancient tombs in Silwan, before they were almost entirely engulfed by the expansion of the village.



Figure 10: PEF/P/1466 (Charles F. Tyrwhitt-Drake, early 1870s)

View within the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif) to the platform of the Dome of the Rock from the south. Clearly visible in the middle distance is a broad monumental stairway of four steps. This stairway, which was then in a state of dereliction and vanished from view by 1887, may have been a relic of the Herodian Temple complex, possibly linked to the *soreg*, or balustrade, which fenced in the sanctified zone of the Temple Mount. According to ancient sources, Gentiles were refused admission to the area of the Temple beyond this barrier (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15. 417; *Jewish War* 5. 193–4; Mishnah, *Middot* 2:3; see Jacobson and Gibson 1995).



Figure 11: PEF/P/1829 (Maison Bonfils, 1867-70)

View over the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif), from the location of the Antonia fortress, which stood at the north-west corner of the outer court, showing the exposed rock surfaces and ancient remains that are no longer visible. It is widely believed that the Dome of the Rock, shown in the centre background, is situated on the spot where the ancient Jewish temple formerly stood, being at the highest point in the enclosure, identified with Mount Moriah of the Bible. According to 2 Chron 3:1, 'Solomon began



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to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David, on the site that David had prepared on the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite’.

Figure 12: : PEF/P/5958 (J. Wilson, 1902)

Interior of the twin-aisled vestibule behind the Double Gate and below the Aqsa Mosque, which appears to be little altered since Herod’s day, when it was built as part of his rebuilding of the Temple. This photograph shows the vestibule prior to the severe earthquakes of 1927 and 1937 which severely damaged the Aqsa Mosque. Securing the latter required the central column of the vestibule to be encased in an unsightly armature of concrete, which has marred the integrity of this ancient vestibule. Little is known about the photographer, apart from the fact that he was a minister of the Anglican Church.



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Figure 13: PEF/P/1962 (Robertson and Beato, 1857)

View, westwards, over the Pool of Israel, bordering the north wall of the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif) before it was completely filled in, towards the heart of the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. The northern boundary wall of the Temple Mount is on the left. This part of the Old City has subsequently been altered beyond recognition.



Figure 14: PEF/P/4408 (James McDonald, 1864–65); published as Photograph 27b in the *Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem*

The remains of the monumental Roman gateway, of which the Ecce Homo Arch is the main opening, before the smaller northern opening was partitioned off and incorporated into the chapel of the Sisters of Zion convent. This impressive structure is believed to date from the reign of the emperor Hadrian and his rebuilding of Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina after the Bar Kokhba rebellion was put down in 135 CE. This photograph conveys something of the grandeur of this Roman structure, which the current arrangement obscures.



■ **Brief Notes about the Photographers** (see also Gibson 2003, 170-187)

Francis Bedford (1816–94)

Francis Bedford hailed from a wealthy family. In his youth he took up sketching and producing lithographs and went on to acquire the skills of photography in 1853. He soon earned a reputation for his photographs of landscapes and views of historic monuments in Britain. In 1862 he was appointed by Queen Victoria to accompany the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) on a tour of the Near East in 1862, which covered the entire eastern Mediterranean and the Nile as far as Aswan. From the 210 negatives that he obtained, Bedford released 172 plates for exhibition and publication, and his photographs were received with considerable public acclaim. They were and remain

highly regarded on technical and artistic grounds. His views convey the sense of space and achieve a remarkable depth of field. In most of the compositions there are few or no people in view, which endows them with a rather serene atmosphere, completely at variance with the exotic bustle characteristic of the Victorian romantic image of the Orient.

(La Maison) Bonfils (active 1867-1938)

The Bonfils family established what grew to become one of the most successful commercial photographic enterprises operating in the Levant in the 19th century. The founders of this enterprise were Felix and Marie-Lydie Cabanis Bonfils who moved from France to Beirut in 1867, with their son Adrien where they established a studio, called La Maison Bonfils. Later they established branches in Egypt. The members of the Bonfils family and their assistants ranged over the eastern Mediterranean, taking photographs covering a variety of subject matter, including classical ruins, landscapes and biblical scenes, ethnographic portraits and largely staged images of oriental men and women. The Bonfils studio pandered to commercially popular subjects. Their photographs are technically accomplished but are considered of variable artistic quality. La Maison Bonfils was a major source for images of the Near East for the Western public until its closure in 1938.

Charles Frederick Tyrwhitt Drake (1846–74)

Charles F. Tyrwhitt-Drake was an explorer, orientalist and naturalist who travelled widely in Sinai and the Middle East. He had a facility for languages and a spirit for adventure, which made him suited to expeditionary work, although he suffered from a poor constitution and frequent ill health. A close friend and colleague of the explorer, Richard Burton, they co-authored *Unexplored Syria* in two volumes in 1872. Tyrwhitt-Drake was a senior member of the team engaged on the Survey of Western Palestine from the outset until his death in Jerusalem in 1874, at the age of just 28, probably from the cumulative effects of Malaria. Tyrwhitt-Drake was a keen photographer, and took some of the earliest views of Byzantine sites in the Negev desert, while participating in an expedition to southern Palestine in 1869 led by Edward Palmer (later professor at the University of Cambridge).

John Garstang (1876-1956)

John Garstang was one of the most capable and well-regarded archaeologists working in Palestine during the British Mandate. He was also a competent scholar, whose output is exemplified by his monograph, *The Syrian Goddess* (1913) where he brought together evidence from textual sources, numismatics and archaeology in a magisterial study. However, Garstang also made serious blunders, notably erroneously identifying the Early Bronze Age walls at Jericho with the destruction of the city by Joshua and the army of the Israelites, as told in the Bible (Josh. 2:1- 6:26), dated to nearly a millennium later. While studying mathematics, Garstang developed an interest in archaeology, and in 1899, at the age of 23, he joined the excavations at Abydos in Egypt directed by W. Flinders Petrie. After gaining some additional field experience in Anatolia, he proceeded to direct excavations at several sites in Egypt and at Meröe in the Sudan. By the age of 31, he was appointed Professor of Archaeology at Liverpool University. After World War I, when Palestine came under British rule, Garstang served as first Director of the Department of Antiquities between 1920 and 1926 and as Head of the newly formed British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem from 1919 to 1926. He also excavated a number of sites in Palestine, including Ashkelon, Hazor, and Jericho. In 1947, he took up the post of founding Director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara in 1947. Garstang was a prolific photographer, documenting sites and landscapes across the Land of Israel, in the years before the country was radically transformed by economic and building development. This remarkable pictorial record, which including photographs of his own excavations at Ashkelon, Hazor and Jericho, forms an important component of the PEF's photographic collection.

Frank Mason Good (active 1866–1928)

The career of Frank Mason Good is relatively obscure. It is known that his first visit to the Near East was undertaken on behalf of the eminent commercial photographer, Francis Frith. Good's early photographs in the region, taken in 1866-67, appear unsigned in some of Frith's books, but they are easy to recognise because of their very specific character. His later photographs bear his signature in the negatives. All in all, Good made four visits to the Levant between 1866 and 1875, but only the first and last included photography in Palestine. His oeuvre includes landscapes, views of holy sites and ethnographic studies of Near Eastern types and crafts. Although posed, Good's ethnographic photographs are made to appear authentic. Engravings based on his photographs are to be found in several books published in the late 19th century.

James Graham (1806 – 1869)

James Graham came to Jerusalem in 1853 from Scotland where he had worked in banking, and learnt photography on the side, which he would use while carrying out missionary work on behalf of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. He remained in Jerusalem until 1856, when he decided to give up his missionary activity. While there, Graham befriended the Pre-Raphaelite painters William Holman Hunt and Thomas Seddon. He then spent several months in Egypt, afterwards revisiting Jerusalem and the Holy Land in 1857. The PEF's collection of Graham's photographs was bequeathed by Elizabeth Anne Finn, wife of James Finn, a 19th century British Consul to Jerusalem, at her death in 1921. There is an explicit biblical interest that informs his images. Many scenes, dated to the years 1854 to 1857, are accompanied by handwritten titles quoting biblical passages, which provide their context. His photographic prints frequently exhibit a grainy effect, as a result of the salt-print technique Graham employed. This technique was developed in the 1830s but was superseded in the 1850s by the albumen printing process. However, the earlier technique is capable of producing highly atmospheric results. In 1859, 45 of his photographs of Jerusalem were shown at the exhibition of the Societé Française de Photographie in Paris and received highly favourable reviews.

Sergeant James McDonald RE (1822 – 1885)

Sergeant (later Sergeant Major) James McDonald of the Royal Engineers was principal photographer of the Ordnance Survey of Jerusalem of 1864-65, led by Captain (later Major General Sir) Charles W. Wilson, and again on the Ordnance Survey of Sinai (1868-69) which was directed by Captain Henry Palmer, in collaboration with Charles W. Wilson. He then went to Egypt to take photographs of the pyramids before returning to England, where he became the manager of the Photographic Office of the Royal Engineers at Chatham. His photographs from both Jerusalem and Sinai differ in character from the work of more commercial photographers such as La Maison Bonfils in their subject matter, being taken specifically to provide records of scientifically conducted surveys. They are not only distinctive, but are frequently outstanding both technically and for their highly resolved detail of architecture, archaeological remains and landscapes. McDonald's negatives were held at the Ordnance Survey in Southampton and were destroyed in the World War II bombing. Fortunately, albums of prints from both PEF expeditions survive, including those preserved in the archives of the PEF.

Henry Phillips RE (1830s–1905/6)

Corporal Henry Phillips of the Royal Engineers was the photographer that accompanied two of the Fund's earliest expeditions, and is well known as one of the pioneer photographers of the Holy Land. He enlisted with the Royal Engineers at Devonport in 1853 and served with them until 1874. Following his discharge he established a photographic business in Farnborough in Surrey. He learnt photography as part of his training at the Military School of the Royal Engineers at Chatham, where this discipline was taught from 1856. In 1865 Corporal Phillips travelled to Palestine as part of a small team led by Charles W. Wilson, charged with undertaking a 'reconnaissance' study, in preparation for the Survey of Western Palestine. Their itinerary took this party through the Lebanon to Baalbek and on to Damascus, and then headed south through the Galilee to Hebron, ending in Jerusalem four months later. This excursion was not without mishaps. Early on, their photographic tent was stolen in Harran, and had to have a new one made. This first expedition ended with 164 glass negatives, which were judged to be of adequate quality to be used for a collection of prints. On his return to Britain, Phillips was promoted to sergeant and invited to accompany Captain Charles Warren RE in a PEF project to further investigate the topography of Jerusalem, largely focusing on the area of the Temple Mount (al-Haram al-Sharif), with the objective of elucidating the locations of the Temples of Solomon and of Herod. Phillips arrived in Jerusalem on 17 February 1867, and spent six months there before returning to England. On this visit, he photographed the area in and around Jerusalem, as well as other places in the country. Like McDonald, Phillips took his images specifically for the purpose of providing a scientific record, and so the subjects and their treatment tend to differ somewhat from those of the commercial photographers, not being contrived nor specially composed with an artistic eye. The quality of his photographs is variable, which is not surprising given trying conditions in which he was working.

James Robertson (1813–88) and Antonio (after 1832–1906) and Felice (1832–1909) Beato

James Robertson was a British photographer who began his career as an engraver. While working as an engraver and die stamper at the Imperial Ottoman mint in Constantinople (Istanbul) in the 1840s, he developed an interest in photography. In 1853 he joined forces with Felice Beato, a British citizen of Venetian extraction, forming a partnership and opening a photographic studio in Pera, Constantinople. In about 1855, James Robertson

married Lionilda Marie Matilda Beato, the sister of Antonio and Felice Beato. That year saw Robertson and Felice Beato in the Crimea, where they photographed the fall of Sebastopol. In 1857 Robertson and either or both the Beato brothers travelled to the Near East, where they produced a number of topographical photographs in Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Many of their photographs in the PEF collection were bequeathed by Elizabeth Finn, who met Robertson during his stay in Jerusalem. The firm Robertson & Beato was dissolved in 1867. Some of their finest photographs were taken in Constantinople, Malta, Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo and the Crimea. In early 1858 Felice Beato travelled to India where he documented scenes of destruction and brutality wrought during the Indian Mutiny of 1857. After leaving the partnership, Robertson returned to work as an engraver at the Imperial Ottoman Mint, retiring in 1881. He then left for Japan, where he died in April 1888.

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