

Genocide in Satellite Croatia Chapter VIII. Final Attempt to Save the Monster



Ivan Šarić, the Roman Catholic archbishop who supported pro-Ustashi activities and rhetoric, including his support for forcible conversions to Catholicism inside the Independent State of Croatia during World War II.

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AT THE BEGINNING of the summer of 1944 the dawn of liberty was rising in all parts of the world. But the Ustashi government decided to carry on the crimes until the very end, while increasing the brutality. The newspaper, *Hrvatski Narod*, wrote: "Our people have declared war on the Serbs. This means death or total expulsion from Bosnia-Herzegovina." *Hrvatski Narod*, July 4, 1944.

In the village of Prijane, district of Glamoc, the Ustashi broke into Pero Cvekic's house where there were 36 in the family. Thirty-three happened to be at home. Every one of them was massacred. A few who were in the hay loft were burned alive. Testimonies collected by Dobrijevic and published in *American Srbobran*, July 8, 1952.

In the village of Halapic, also in the district of Glamoc, the Ustashi arrested 137 people one day, most of them women and children. Thirty-seven were burned alive in Ostoja Loncar's store, while the others had their throats cut. *Ibid.*

In the village of Dubrave the Ustashi massacred 45 families. The ocular witness who saw the massacres was Petar Guzijan, now living in Gary, Indiana. *Ibid.*

One day the Ustashi came to the village of Debeljak. They raped five girls between the ages of 13 and 15 in Radoje Krstan's house. A neighbor, Stevanija Stanivuk, who happened to be in the house, was killed because she tried to

ward off the aggressors. The witness, Milan Stanivuk, who was hidden in the house, is now living in Gary, Indiana. *Ibid.*

In the village of Podgreda, the Ustashi gathered 120 people together, among whom was Jovo Gvekic's son, a baby only three days old. This infant and Anica Krisic's newborn child, were closed up in the house and burned alive. The witness of this crime is Ilija Krasic, now living in Gary, Indiana. *Ibid.*

At Travnik, Hazim Satric was Chief of the Ustashi police. He liquidated many Serbs, among whom was Dr. Jajcanin, Mahmud Robovic, a journalist, and Stanko Turudija. The son of the latter was stabbed on his father's chest.

After the massacre at Travnik, Satric was assigned to a higher position by Andrija Artukovic, at Banja Luka, with Viktor Gutic, where he distinguished himself by his cruelty in committing the innumerable crimes, some of which have already been cited. Since in 1944 the region was lacking in salt, he took advantage of the situation and distributed salt to the population at the price of "two pounds of salt for every ear of a Serb."

And thus the wave of terror swept over the whole of satellite Croatia.

The Catholic newspapers went to the Poglavnik's rescue, and redoubled their appeals to the population so that it would make every effort to defend satellite Croatia. "Now we are making the greatest, the most urgent, and the most difficult demand, that of helping the nation to emerge from its traditional opposition by entering into an active collaboration with the authorities." *Katolicki List*, July 18, 1944.

The Franciscan, Krsto Krizanic, in making a similar appeal to the Croatian intellectuals for the defense and the consolidation of the Ustashi state said: "Croatian intellectuals should be constructive and positive in all that concerns the state. They should look with disdain upon the heritage of our past, such as passive contemplation, listless expectancy and destructive opposition to our welfare which resides in the safeguarding of our state for the well-being of every Croatian, and, above all, for the intellectuals. . . . Individually the Ustashi may have their faults, but their greatest merit lies in their sacrifices for the founding of a new Croatian state. Just because of their minor faults it would be sheer madness not to acknowledge their fundamental and vital success, the Croatian state." *Hrvatski Narod*, January 6, 1945.

Calling the ferocious bestiality of the Ustashi assassins "minor faults" and merely "individual" was, indeed, a pleasing euphemism, which corresponds to the one used by His Grace Stepinac when he referred to the "dare-devil fanatics belonging to the ecclesiastical ranks." But the most remarkable of all was this first allusion to the Croatian Catholic hierarchy trying to free their compatriots from the systematic opposition they had been practicing for centuries, a reflection which has been noted in this volume. Only Pavelic and his henchmen, financed by Fascist Italy, were judged worthy of such a complete change of attitude.

Early in 1944 Pavelic's War Ministry issued a special prayer book for

soldiers, entitled "The Croatian Soldier." The book was prepared by the priest, Vilim Cecelja, Stepinac's deputy in the army vicariate, and was issued with permission of the Archbishopric Spiritual Board in Zagreb.

The Spiritual Board, at that time, was composed of the following members: Archbishop Stepinac, and Bishops Dr. Salis Sevis, Dr. Josip Lah, Ignacije Rodic and Valentin Malek. The prayer book is full of pleas to God on behalf of Pavelic, the Independent State of Croatia and the Ustashi. In one of these, the priest asks for blessings of the Ustashi, or the Domobranici (National Guard Home Defense), on the occasion of their taking an oath of loyalty to Pavelic. This blessing reads: "Almighty and immortal God, Father of strength and mercy, Thou who will not allow anyone who believes in Thee to fail, turn thy mercy, Father, to Thy children, the Croatian Ustashi and Domobranici, who today take an oath of allegiance to their country and to their chieftain. Help them, God, in Thy mercy, to accept with all their hearts and souls the words they pronounce, so that they will be ready to give everything for the Croatian fatherland and for the Chieftain, even their lives. Thus may the blessings of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost be upon you and stay with you always. Amen." Horvat and Stambuk, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

After Italy's capitulation, the Pavelic regime was on its way toward the debacle. Confusion and complete demoralization overcame Croatia, even before Germany's obvious defeat. Certain Ustashi circles tried to make the best of the situation. At the beginning of September 1944, the Minister of National Defense, Vokic, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mladen Lorkovic, organized a revolt at the Palace to overthrow Pavelic, But the conspiracy failed and the two accomplices were shot.

This sounded the alarm of the approaching debacle of the satellite state of Croatia. Pavelic tried to escape by committing an act of treason and by stabbing those in the back who had put him in power. In November he sent a memorandum by one of his agents to General Sir Henry Maitland, Chief Allied Commander of the Mediterranean at Caserta, a memorandum in which he called attention to the "political rights and aspirations of Croatia" and proposed that he join the Allies with his army in the fight against Germany.

As indicated earlier, the Catholic clergy continued to offer full support to the dying regime, the support which Pavelic had acknowledged with gratitude by decorating His Grace Stepinac in 1944 with the "Large Cross with a Star." Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 1035. Consequently, when Germany's defeat became imminent, the Poglavnik decided to make one final effort to save the "Independent State" and his own personal situation by referring once again to those who had been such a help to him up until then. The Catholic Episcopacy, on his request, held a conference on March 24, 1945, at the end of which it published a pastoral letter, intended less for its flock than for the Allied governments. Its principle aim was to emphasize the memorandum which Pavelic had sent to the English and the Americans, and point up the struggle of the Croatian people, or rather of the Ustashi government, as standing up against communism. The Allies' interests, he said, lay in the preservation of the puppet state which would now join the democratic powers with all its force. It was the second attempt of the Poglavnik in this direction, the first having been made in November 1944.

Here is the text of the letter of the Episcopacy, which is more political than pastoral:

"History has taught us that during a past of 1,300 years, the Croatian people have never ceased to defend their rights of liberty and independence, both of which they ardently desire also for other people. And when during the second world war this ideal was strengthened and realized in our own state, the Croatian Catholic bishops have respected the wish of the Croatian people. Consequently, no one has the right to reproach any citizen of this state nor any of its bishops for having respected the indomitable will of the Croatian people." *Katolicki List*, No. 12-43, 1948.

But the "line" was too obvious and the second plea was completely ignored by the Allied governments. Furthermore, there was not the slightest trace of any intercession by the use of those famous secret defense weapons, hailed by German propaganda, and which served for so long in maintaining certain ultimate illusions. So, for the third and last time Pavelic tried to save the monster that he had conceived, in transferring power to His Grace Stepinac. Negotiations were started for this purpose and lasted for several days without success.

There remained only one solution for Pavelic and his henchmen—escape. The patriotic song "Za Dom Spremni" (Ready for Fatherland), no longer echoed throughout Croatia, where the only idea that obsessed countless people was for "everybody to run who could."

On the evening before their departure, May 4, 1945, Pavelic and Macek took leave of His Grace Stepinac during a secret session at the Palace of the Archbishopric. Before separating, His Grace Stepinac gave them the accolade and then his blessing for having both worked so valiantly for Croatia and the Roman Catholic faith.

His Grace Stepinac, in rendering Pavelic one last service, accepted the important dossiers of the Ustashi government and all the films and records of the Poglavnik's speeches, as well as the coffers filled with gold, and jewels and watches stolen from the Jews and the Serbs who had been assassinated. These were discovered at the Archbishopric and in the basements of some of the churches, and even under the altar at the monastery. As someone wrote: "Even the vicarages were used as cantonments, and the churches for storing weapons." *Le Monde*, December 7, 1951.

After this meeting, which revealed even further the union between political and spiritual Croatia, the Ustashi General, Moskov, commanding Pavelic's personal bodyguard, entrusted Macek with the necessary passports for himself, his family and four deputies, as well as two cars and spending money amounting to 1,000 gold louis. *Drina* (Ustashi monthly paper, published in Madrid), April 1954. Also *Croatia* (Ustashi paper, published in Buenos Aires), April 10, 1957. The following day, the Croatian caravan, composed of Pavelic and his suite, Macek and his suite, plus a few thousand executioners and torturers, and about 500 priests and Croatian religious officials, in a convoy such as has rarely been seen in all history, left Zagreb under the protection of the last German troops in retreat, and took the road of exile in the direction of Austria.

Thus it was that the most perfidious and blood-thirsty men of all satellite countries disappeared, leaving behind them almost a million victims.

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By examining the sinister balance sheet, it is calculated that the Pavelic-Artukovic government succeeded in massacring approximately 750,000 Orthodox Serbs, and either deported or chased away 300,000. It is obvious that the number of victims in Croatia would have been even more numerous had the Serbs not joined the underground to save their lives and their religion. There were also 60,000 Jews and 26,000 Gypsies killed.

About 240,000 Serbian Orthodox were converted by force to Catholicism, the largest number of which, it should be mentioned, took place on the territory of His Grace Stepinac's diocese.

Professor Robert Lee Wolff describes the massacres committed by the Ustashi government, and the forced conversions, in the following paragraphs:

Even more savage were the ghastly Ustashi massacres of Jews and Serbs in "Croatia." The Jews of Zagreb and Sarajevo were killed or sent to concentration camps, or deported to Poland for extermination. Ustashi gangs also slaughtered tens of thousands of Serbs. To some they offered the choice between conversion from Orthodoxy to Catholicism, or instant death. Others were permitted to join a new and totally artificial "Croat Orthodox Church" with a Hitlerite White Russian at its head. In the mixed Serb-Croat villages, incredible scenes of violence took place, the whole population often being herded into Orthodox churches and burned alive. In this bloody work the Ustashi often had the assistance of many of the Muslim population, who were, from the first, treated with special favor by the Pavelic authorities (a mosque was even opened in Zagreb) and who were eventually recruited into a special SS division of their own, which later in the war, was reviewed and inspected by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem.

It must also be recorded as a historic fact that certain members of Croat hierarchy, notably Archbishop Sharich of Sarajevo, endorsed this butchery, and some members of the Franciscan order took an active part in the forced conversions of the Serbs, and also in the massacres. As for the Archbishop of Zagreb, Stepinac, whose trial and sentence, after the war has been a *cause celebre*, he attended Ustashi ceremonies, belonged to the commission for conversions of the Orthodox and often appeared in public on ceremonial occasions with members of the regime, to which the newspaper of his archdiocese gave its support. *The Balkans in Our Time* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), p. 205. Professor Wolf speaks of tens of thousands of slaughtered Serbs, although it would be truer to speak of hundreds of thousands. When he wrote this book, he could have found many documents about the real number of Ustashi victims.

Attempting to justify, before world public opinion, this enormous proselytic crop of convertees, the Ustashi and Croatian Catholic clericals argued fallaciously that all these people had been Catholic during the Turkish

occupation or during the "first" Yugoslavia and that they had become Serbian Orthodox under different pressure.

This thesis is defended by Archbishop A. Stepinac himself in his diary in which he wrote the following (while at the same time it proves the participation of the Croat Catholic Church in the conversion to Catholicism by force): "The most ideal thing would be if the Serbs were to return to the religion of their forefathers, i.e. to bend their heads before Christ's Vicar— our Holy Father." ("Diary," January 17, 1940, Volume III, p. 413).

Furthermore, in connection with the Turkish occupation, the Catholic propaganda never stops pointing out that "during the Turkish occupation there were mass conversions of Catholics to Orthodoxy." However, the truth of the matter is, that the Bogumil sect passed *en masse* to the Islamic religion, in addition to some Orthodox and probably some Catholics, in order to preserve their privileges and properties. The Turkish administration favored Islam and not Orthodoxy. In fact there were very few Catholics under Turkish domination, because they all left territories penetrated by the Turkish army.

This was also what Pavelic's representative at the Vatican dared to affirm during a conversation with Cardinal Tisserant. But he was dealing with a shrewd man. The French prelate replied that he was well acquainted with the history of Christianity and that, to his knowledge, no Catholic (of Roman rite) had ever become Serbian Orthodox. Rusinovic, *Report to the ministry for foreign affairs*, March 6, 1942. See supplement of *Tajni Dokumenti* for photocopy.

There were doubtless a few thousand people who, for one reason or another, during prewar Yugoslavia changed religions, mostly because of their marriage, just as anywhere else in the world. This, of course, was reciprocal, for the Orthodox did likewise. Even the Croatian press informs us: "The Vatican has been aware, for twenty-two years during the Karageorgevic reign in Yugoslavia, that not even 9,000 Catholics transferred to the Serbian Orthodox religion, and these for the most part, were young girls who had married officers, gendarmes, or custom and tax officials." *Hrvatska Zora* (Munich), September 1, 1954.

As for the material losses of the Serbian Orthodox Church, they amounted to seven billion dinars, to say nothing of the 299 churches which were burned or destroyed. In the one single Serbian Orthodox diocese of Gornji Karlovac (Croatia), located in the diocese of His Grace Alois Stepinac, 173 out of 189 churches were torn down. The churches of Jasenovac, Velika Kladusa, Surduk, Svica, Suha Mlaka, Veljun and Belegis, were turned into slaughterhouses; those of Hadzici, Plaski, Drvar, Travnik, Modric and Gomirje, into stores; those of Vreoce, Drinjaca, Mrkonjic Grad, Cvijanovicevo Brdo and Jajee, into public toilets; while the churches of Citluce, Donji Vakuf, Stari Majdan, Sanski Most, and Majkovac became stables.

In the regions where the Serbian Orthodox constituted the majority of the population, their churches were almost totally destroyed, whereas in the regions where they were in a minority, they were transformed for Catholic services, all of which goes to prove that a well-planned policy had been followed. In reality, the transformation of Serbian Orthodox churches to

Catholic churches was carried on according to orders and instructions given by the Ordinariates. After instructions from the episcopal Ordinariate of Djakovo (NO 2733/42, April, 1942), Serbian Orthodox churches were transformed into Catholic churches in the localities of Bracevci, Majar, Dopsin, Tenje, Dalj, Markusica, Kapelna, Kucanci, Paucje, Budimci, Poganovci, Bijelo Brdo, Borovo Selo, Trpinja, Pacetin, Brsadin, Cepin, Martinci Capinski, Trnjani, Klokocevik, Topolje, Brod na Savi.

The following is an authorization, like the kind that came from the Ordinariate of Djakovo, and destined for the priests, O. Stjepan Rade and O. Pavao Dodic (No. 848/42, dated February 14, 1942) coming only three months after the Plenary Conference of the Catholic Episcopacy (November 17, 1941), it throws light on the sincerity of the declaration concerning the spoliation of the edifices and holdings of the Serbian Orthodox church.

Since there are no Catholic churches or holy liturgical objects left in any of the villages of the County of Vukovar where the missionary brothers were sent, the missionary brothers are henceforward permitted to transform the Greek Church of oriental rituals into a Catholic church, for the purpose of giving preliminary religious instruction for the eventual use of Catholic ritual and, above all, for Holy Mass. This must be in agreement with a competent parochial Catholic office and the Orthodox inhabitants of the locality who have made a request to be taken into the Catholic church. In order to accomplish this, the iconographic altar should be taken down. In cases where this is impossible, a temporary altar can be erected in front of the "iconostase." (a wall of icons and religious paintings) All objects displaced should be brought to a designated locality, whereas all objects necessary for Holy Mass and lent by the parochial diocese, will be turned over to the missionaries. In this way they will be able to officiate at Holy mass every day, even in the locality where religious instruction is taking place. Before beginning services, the church should first be blessed according to the specified benediction noted in the book of ritual. Holy water should be brought to the parochial church and protected from the cold. In certain regions where the transformation of the church for Catholic ritual has not been possible, a demand to a competent district office should be necessary for requisitioning the primary school. Viktor Novak, *op. cit.*, p. 690.

Such a document sufficed in proving, if proof was still needed, the close ties that bound the Catholic hierarchy and the Ustashi government on all the details concerning their mutual racist and religious policy.

All possessions of the Serbian Orthodox church were confiscated and turned over to the Croatian Catholic church. His Grace Stepinac, for instance, was given the Orahovica Monastery, which he ceded to the Trappists, while Bishop Janko Simrak took over the Lepavina Monastery, built in the sixteenth century, the same monastery where Patriarch Arsenije Carnojevic stayed in 1693, while organizing the emigration of the Serbs who had left southern Serbia during the Turkish invasion of Europe.

Thus, notwithstanding all the hues and cries that have circulated abroad, the Croatian Catholic hierarchy, via the state directorate for reconstruction, and via the commission for the confiscation of Serbian Orthodox churches and

their estates, attached to the State Museum in Zagreb, appropriated the furnishings and buildings of the "rival" church.

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Once hate came to dwell in the human heart it seems to have remained there once and for all. In 1946, after a frightful holocaust which reached to the heavens, His Grace Stepinac again showed the same execration (cursing) toward the Orthodox in general, and the Serbian people in particular.

While not having had the satisfaction of seeing the "schism" ended by the Germans, the Ustashi, or by the Hungarians and Albanians, His Grace Stepinac had not despaired of the future and entrusted the plan of *Pax Romana* to a British officer—the crushing of Orthodoxy.

Below are the words of this British officer, who gives an integral description of his visit to the Archbishop of Zagreb:

Eighteen months ago, while serving as a British liaison officer in Yugoslavia, I read in the German-controlled press and heard over the Zagreb radio the call of Archbishop Stepinac to his people to rally to the crumbling Croat State and resist the Allied armies which were advancing toward a final victory. A few weeks later, Zagreb was freed, Pavelic had fled and the Archbishop remained.

Back in Zagreb a year later, I was surprised in view of the many changes which had taken place in Yugoslavia, to find His Grace Stepinac still primate in Croatia. I called on him in his palace and he talked with me alone over an hour. He told me frankly that he and those of his priests who had collaborated with the Germans had done so because the issue in the war had been a clear one between fascism and communism, and he had chosen the former while the British had chosen the latter. He regretted the horrors of the Nazi occupation, but he preferred them to the present Federal regime, first, because this had, in his view, been imposed on Croatia by the Serbs, and, secondly, because while the Germans and Ustashi had burned the churches and killed the congregations, the Communists, by their educational and land reforms were threatening the hold of the Church over its schools and estates. He looked to the West to use its atomic power to impose Western civilization on Moscow and Belgrade before it was too late, . . . As I passed through the shadowed cloisters into the Cathedral square, I wondered how long His Grace would retain the spiritual leadership of the Church of Croatia. *The New Statesman and Nation* (London), October 26, 1946.

In the mind of His Grace Stepinac, this atomic war would be nothing more than a great crusade against Orthodoxy, which would open the way to the Roman church in Russia, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Serbia. Imposing Western civilization was synonymous with imposing Catholicism by fire and by sword. This was the doctrine of "re-christianization," developed by the German Jesuit, Friedrich Muckermann. In his book, *Catholic Action* (prefaced by Cardinal Pacelli, subsequently Pope Pius XII, but at the time apostolic

nuncio at Munich) , Muckermann defined the aims of this association in the following paragraph:

"The Pope is appealing to 'Catholic Action' for a new crusade. It is our guide, bearing the standard of Christ. It is not only the Church that is involved, but also the state, and the fields of science and art. Catholic Action signifies the rallying of world Catholicism. It must live through its heroic hour, for it is from the blood of martyrs that the first era of western Christianity was made. A new world can only be gained at the price of bloodshed for Christ."

His Grace Stepinac, the indisputable Head of Catholic Action in Croatia, was made Cardinal by Pius XII. The Pontiff justified this promotion to a higher office in a discourse he gave at the Consistory, January 12, 1953: "Although absent we embrace him with fatherly love—and we strongly desire that everyone know that when we decided to decorate him with the nobility of the Roman purple, we had nothing else in mind save to reward in a manner befitting his deserving merits. . . . [for he] is an example of apostolic zeal and of Christian fortitude." *The New York Times*, International Edition (New York), January 13, 1953.

In these pages it has been shown what these "services," so highly praised by the Holy Father, really signified. Moreover, the nature of them has been again recently confirmed by one higher up and more qualified to recognize their value. This is none other than the Jesuit Father Stjepan (Stephen) Lackovic, His Grace Stepinac's secretary during the war, and since the defeat of the Axis, a refugee in the United States. He has risen up against the extradition of Andrija Artukovic, whom Yugoslavia requested of the U.S.A., so that he could be judged for his innumerable crimes. In unison with R. F. Ross, in an interview with an editor of the *Mirror News* in Los Angeles, he declared: "Adrija Artukovic is the leading Catholic layman of Croatia and was the lay spokesman of Cardinal Stepinac. Hardly a day passed between 1941 and 1945 but what I was in his office or he was in mine. He consulted with the Cardinal on the moral aspects of every action he took." *Mirror News* (Los Angeles), January 24, 1958.

It is therefore very clear, according to the statement of his own secretary, that His Grace Stepinac watched and approved every step of Artukovic, Minister of the Interior and Ustashi government as well. And when one considers the "activities" of this Croatian Himmler, who was chief of police as well as of the concentration camps, and who decided on the life and death of the Orthodox Serbs and the Jews, one must conclude that these "activities" had been previously submitted to the Archbishop of Zagreb for his "moral" approval.

In the light of this testimony, how can the so-called interventions of His Grace Stepinac, through Andrija Artukovic, Minister of the Interior, not be considered gestures, meant to mislead public opinion? The following is a sample of such intervention:

Jasenovac camp is a shameful stain on the honor of the Independent State of Croatia. It is a disgrace to Croatia. Already there are so many measures that

those who know the situation [reference to the Jews in Croatia] will say that not even in Germany were the racial laws applied with such rigor and such speed. I do not think it can bring us any glory if it is said of us that we have solved the Jewish problem in the most radical way, that is to say, the cruelest. ... Let the personal and civil liberty of the Jews, or the descendants of Jews who after their conversion to the Catholic church no longer consider themselves Jews, but who take part in all the Croatian activities, religious and patriotic, be protected. Letter from Stepinac to Andrija Artukovic, dated May 30, 1941.

It seems that Stepinac was interested only in those Jews who had been converted, for he added: "I wrote to you, Mr. Minister, on May 22nd of this year, asking that you do something to protect the Jews converted to Catholicism from the Jewish religion." *Ibid.*

Further evidence of the Archbishop's influence with the Ustashi regime, as well as of his hatred for the Serbian church, was brought out by Siegfried Kasche, Nazi Minister to Pavelic, at the trial of Stepinac in 1946. When the Germans drove 500 priests from Slovenia toward Serbia, Stepinac asked that these priests be allowed to stay in Croatia, where he would find them a place, and that in their place 500 Serbian clergymen from Croatia be driven out.

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One might say that Roman purple had a symbolic value; it signified that he who was clothed in scarlet was ready to shed his blood for his faith. Quantities of blood were shed "for Christ," according to Jesuit Father Muckermann, but it was not the blood of the future Cardinal, it was the blood of 750,000 Serbs, 60,000 Jews, and 26,000 Gypsies who became innocent victims.

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