



ARABIC AS INTELLECTUAL RESILIENCE: EGYPT'S LINGUISTIC CONTINUITY AMID THE CRUSADES AND MONGOL INVASIONS

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Abstract

This article examines the role of Arabic as a foundation of intellectual resilience in Egypt during the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, particularly under the Ayyubid and Mamluk dynasties. It focuses on how Arabic functioned in sustaining the continuity of knowledge, reinforcing religious identity, supporting political legitimacy, and accommodating cultural interaction during periods of major political disruption. This study employs a qualitative historical design using document analysis of relevant historical and scholarly sources. The data were interpreted through a historical-interpretive approach to identify recurring patterns concerning the relationship between language, intellectual continuity, and civilizational resilience in medieval Egypt. The findings suggest that, within the documented historical context, Arabic functioned not only as a medium of scholarly communication but also as a language of religious authority, educational transmission, and political legitimacy. Educational institutions such as Al-Azhar and Ayyubid madrasas played an important role in preserving Arabic as the main language of religious and intellectual instruction, while the Mamluk administration employed Arabic to reinforce Islamic political authority despite the rulers' non-Arab background. The study also finds that Arabic showed linguistic adaptability by incorporating foreign elements from Turkish, Persian, and Mongol influences without losing its central intellectual and cultural role. This article argues that, in medieval Egypt, Arabic served as an important instrument for preserving Islamic intellectual traditions and sustaining civilizational continuity during times of crisis.

Keywords: Arabic language, intellectual resilience, Egypt, Crusades, Mongol invasion

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INTRODUCTION | مقدمة

Egypt has played a strategic role in the history of Islamic civilization, not only as a center of politics and military power but also as a beacon of knowledge, culture, and Islamic spirituality. Its geographical location, connecting the East and the West, has made Egypt a meeting point for civilizations, a place where various intellectual traditions and languages converge (Setyawan, 2021). From the Fatimid, Ayyubid, to Mamluk dynasties, the country has been an important arena for the social, political, and intellectual dynamics that have shaped the face of the Islamic world (Petry, 2022). In this context, the Arabic language holds a fundamental position, not only as the language of religion but also as a means of forming the collective identity of Muslims and an instrument for the integration of civilizations.

The Crusades (1099–1291 M) and the Mongol invasion (1258 M) were two major events that shook the foundations of the medieval Islamic world. These invasions not only devastated political and military structures but also threatened the existence of the Islamic scholarly

tradition that had developed over centuries. When Baghdad, the center of Islamic knowledge, was destroyed in the Mongol invasion, Egypt emerged as a new center for intellectual and religious revival keagamaan (Parangu & Restu, 2024). In this critical situation, Arabic became the primary tool for maintaining the continuity of Islamic scholarship through teaching, writing, and documenting classical manuscripts that were at risk of extinction.

During the Ayyubid dynasty (1171–1250 M), Arabic was positioned as the official language of the state and education. Institutions such as Al-Azhar and the madrassas founded by Saladin played a significant role in preserving Islamic intellectual heritage while strengthening the Islamic identity of the Egyptian people (Laming et al., 2025). Meanwhile, during the Mamluk period (1250–1382 M), the role of Arabic became even more entrenched as the language of science and diplomacy, despite the Mamluk rulers themselves coming from non-Arab ethnic backgrounds. This fact demonstrates that the dominance of Arabic was not merely an ethnic issue, but rather due to its status as the language of knowledge, religion, and civilization (Wulandari & Rahmadani, 2025).

Arabic in medieval Egypt also functioned as an instrument of cultural transfer and resistance. The interaction between Arabs, Turks, Kurds, and Mongols gave rise to a complex linguistic phenomenon, where the interference of foreign elements occurred within social and administrative realms (Salvaggio, 2024). However, at the same time, Arabic successfully exported the scientific and spiritual values of Islam through a process of transfer that enriched its vocabulary and scholarly traditions (Ezzat, 2022). Thus, Arabic not only became a symbol of Muslim unity but also a tool for dynamic cultural adaptation, demonstrating its resilience in the face of ideological and linguistic penetration from outside.

Several previous studies emphasize that Arabic plays a strategic role in maintaining the resilience of identity, culture, and the continuity of Islamic civilization, especially in regions like Egypt. Research by Al-Ma'arif, Al-Harbi, and Meliano (2023) highlights Arabic as a symbol of religious identity that unites Muslims across nations, not merely as a tool for formal communication. Ghaly (2023) also asserts that Arabic functions as the primary tool in building and revitalizing Islamic culture through the transmission of knowledge and religious traditions from the early days of Islam to modernity (Ghaly, 2023). Another study by Sekarsari et al. shows that Arabic remains foundational in Islamic education due to its status as the language of revelation, used in the Quran and Hadith, and as the medium of instruction in many contemporary Islamic institutions and pesantren (Sekarsari et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the adaptive aspect of Arabic to foreign cultures has also been examined by several scholars. A study by Karagözlü (2023) proves that the incorporation of Persian and Arabic terms into Ibn Muhanna's dictionary did not diminish the scientific function of Arabic; rather, it enriched its usage within the intellectual discourse of the medieval period (Karagözlü, 2021). A similar view is presented in a study by Khan (2022) from Cambridge, which shows that Arabic, in the early Islamic period, including in Egypt, absorbed administrative vocabulary from various cultures but maintained its structure as the primary language for official documentation and scholarly pursuits. Geographically, Egypt plays a crucial role in preserving Arabic as an instrument of culture and politics. Setyawan (2023) argues that Egypt plays a strategic role in maintaining the identity of Arabic through institutions such as Al-Azhar and national media, despite challenges from globalization and the use of local dialects (Setyawan, 2021).

Thus, the literature strengthens the argument that Arabic is not just a tool for communication, but also a strategic instrument in preserving identity, political legitimacy, and

the intellectual continuity of Islamic civilization. These studies provide empirical foundations to analyze the role of Arabic during the Crusades and Mongol invasions, while also connecting it to contemporary relevance in the modern Islamic world. This research aims to fill this gap by analyzing the role of Arabic as the foundation of Egypt's intellectual resilience amidst the turmoil, with a focus on strengthening Islamic identity, the production of knowledge, and political legitimacy.

METHOD

منهج

This study employed a qualitative historical research design with a document analysis approach to examine the role of Arabic as a foundation of intellectual resilience in Egypt during the Crusades and the Mongol invasions. A historical-interpretive perspective was used to analyze how Arabic functioned in educational, religious, political, and cultural contexts during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods. This design was selected because the study focuses on interpreting historical meaning, continuity, and transformation through written sources rather than on quantitative measurement (Syahrizal & Jailani, 2023).

The data consisted of primary and secondary historical sources relevant to medieval Egypt, the history of the Arabic language, and Islamic intellectual traditions. Primary sources included historical chronicles, religious texts, and administrative references, while secondary sources consisted of academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and scholarly studies on Egypt during the Crusades and Mongol invasions. Sources were selected purposively based on three criteria: relevance to the research focus, historical proximity to the period under study, and scholarly credibility. Sources that were not directly related to Egypt, did not address the linguistic or intellectual dimensions of the topic, or lacked sufficient academic reliability were excluded from the analysis. To ensure credibility, the study applied historical source criticism by considering authorship, date, context of production, and consistency across sources.

Data collection was conducted through archival research and literature review. The collected materials were then analyzed using an interactive qualitative procedure adapted from Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The thematic categories were developed from the research objectives and refined during the reading process to identify recurring patterns related to the preservation of knowledge, educational transmission, political legitimacy, and cultural adaptation. Interpretation was conducted through historical hermeneutics by considering temporal context, authorial perspective, and socio-political background, while triangulation across historical and scholarly sources was used to strengthen interpretive consistency. This study also recognizes the limitations of historical research, particularly the uneven availability of sources and the interpretive nature of retrospective analysis.

RESULT

نتائج

Arabic as an Instrument of Intellectual Resilience Amid Political Crisis

During the Crusades and the Mongol invasions, Egypt became the last bastion of Islamic civilization when the regions of Sham and Baghdad were destroyed. In this chaotic situation, the Arabic language served as a means of preserving the scientific traditions inherited from the Abbasid period (Laming et al., 2025). Through this language, scientific works continued to be written, studied, and taught, even though many Islamic institutions in other regions were destroyed by attacks. Arabic became the link between previous generations of scholars and their

successors, ensuring the continuity of Islamic epistemology remained intact amid political turmoil.

The function of the Arabic language is not limited to scientific communication, but also serves as a tool for social and religious unity (Laming et al., 2025). In sermons, fatwas, and teaching in madrasas, Arabic serves to consolidate the identity of Muslims in Egypt, who are ethnically diverse, including Arabs, Kurds, Turks, and Nubians. This language removes political and ethnic barriers that could weaken community solidarity, thus becoming an instrument of national and religious integration (Mohamed & Mohamed, 2024).

Scholars such as Ibn Daqiq al-'Id and al-Subki played an important role in maintaining the purity of Arabic in scientific and religious works. They wrote books in classical Arabic (fushā), rather than local dialects, to reinforce universal scholarly authority in the Islamic world. This practice shows that Arabic is not only a linguistic tool, but also a symbol of scholarly legitimacy that serves to maintain Islamic authority in Egypt (Gumilar, 2021).

Furthermore, the role of Arabic is also evident in bureaucracy and state documents. The Mamluk government used Arabic as the official language of administration, replacing the use of Persian and Turkish, which were popular in other regions. This shows a political awareness that Egypt's strength lies in the continuity of its language, which not only represents power but also scholarship and Islam (Permana et al., 2025). In addition to the scientific, social, and administrative functions mentioned above, Arabic also played a role in strengthening Egypt's cultural identity in the Islamic world. The use of this language in various aspects of life, from education to government, emphasizes that Egypt is not only a political center but also a center of Islamic civilization that preserves scientific and theological traditions. In this context, Arabic has become a symbol of pride and cultural resilience, strengthening the collective awareness of the importance of preserving existing intellectual heritage (Setyawan, 2021).

Furthermore, in the world of education, Al-Azhar and the Ayyubiyah madrasah became places where Arabic was not only studied but also internalized as an instrument of critical thinking and Islamic rationality. Here, Arabic served as a medium for interpreting religious texts and responding to the challenges of the times. Arabic language learning in these institutions not only teaches grammar, but also trains scientific reasoning that shapes a deep understanding of Islamic teachings, as well as responding to developing socio-political dynamics (Amar, 2023).

Thus, Arabic in Egypt during the Crusades and the Mongol invasion served as more than just a means of communication. It became a pillar of intellectual resilience, preserving the continuity of Islamic knowledge and religious identity even though many institutions were destroyed. In addition, Arabic strengthened social solidarity among different ethnic groups and played a role in government and education as a symbol of cultural resilience. By continuing to be used in fatwas and official documents, Arabic ensured the authenticity of Islamic law and its role in shaping a strong Islamic civilization in Egypt.

Revitalization of Arabic through Al-Azhar and Ayyubiyah Madrasah

The revitalization of educational institutions during the Ayyubiyah period was one of the peaks of intellectual renewal in Egypt (Fattah, 2019). Salahuddin al-Ayyubi, after overthrowing the Shiite Fatimid Dynasty, made Al-Azhar the center of Sunni Islamic scholarship and strengthened the role of Arabic as the primary medium of instruction *pengajaran* (Tamia & Indra, 2024). Arabic is used in all branches of knowledge, from tafsir, hadith, *usul al-fiqh*, to philosophy

and logic, with an emphasis on the formation of scientific and religious reasoning based on classical Arabic texts klasik (2025, السَّلَام & مُحَمَّد).

The Ayyubiyyah madrasah curriculum emphasizes the study of Arabic grammar (nahwu-sharf), as the ability to understand classical Arabic texts is considered key to correctly interpreting Islamic teachings (Nurdin & Anshari, 2024). The works of scholars such as Ibn Malik and Sibawaih are the main references. Through this curriculum, Arabic is not only taught as a linguistic skill, but as an instrument of scientific and theological thinking that strengthens the reasoning abilities of generations of Egyptian scholars (Fachrina et al., 2025).

Al-Azhar then developed into a center for the reproduction of Arab-Islamic scholars and scientists (Shabana, 2021). The fusha Arabic language used there fostered high linguistic standards and became a benchmark for scientific legitimacy. Students from various regions came to Egypt to study and brought home an intellectual spirit rooted in the Arabic language. This phenomenon made Egypt the epicenter of the spread of language and knowledge to the western and eastern Islamic world (Mohd. Shamsuddin & Hj. Ahmad, 2018).

From a historical perspective, the role of Al-Azhar and the Ayyubiyyah madrasah shows that the resilience of Islamic civilization in Egypt was born not only from political power, but also from the success in maintaining and institutionalizing Arabic as the language of science and da'wah. This language became the lifeblood of civilization that maintained intellectual continuity from the classical to the modern era (Mohd. Shamsuddin & Hj. Ahmad, 2018).

In addition to the important role played by Al-Azhar and the Ayyubiyyah madrasah, we must also note that the Arabic language in Egypt was not limited to the teaching of religion and philosophy, but also included the teaching of science and mathematics. At that time, many Islamic scientists wrote scientific works in Arabic, which became the main reference in the academic world. Arabic became a global scientific language that enabled knowledge from various branches of science, such as astronomy, chemistry, and medicine, to spread widely throughout the Islamic world (Mardani & Nissa, 2025).

For example, many scientific works originating from Greek, Persian, and Indian traditions were translated and studied in Arabic. The works of scientists such as al-Khwarizmi in mathematics, Ibn Sina in medicine, and al-Biruni in astronomy were written in Arabic and passed on as key references by subsequent generations. On the other hand, Al-Azhar also played a role in preserving and developing Arabic as a language of science that remains relevant in the modern world (Ragab, 2017).

This revitalization concerns not only education and science, but also politics and society. The Arabic language, with all its roles in administration, education, and religion, has become a symbol of pride and the continuity of Islamic intellectual tradition. The power of the Arabic language in preserving the cultural and intellectual identity of Islam in Egypt reflects an invaluable cultural resilience, despite the major changes and political crises that Islamic civilization has experienced throughout the Islamic world. Overall, the revitalization of Arabic that began during the Ayyubid period and was strengthened by Al-Azhar shows that Arabic is not only a means of communication, but also an irreplaceable symbol of Islamic civilization and identity in the world.

Cultural Interference and Transfer in Egyptian Linguistic Dynamics

Contact between Egypt and foreign nations during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods created an interesting phenomenon of linguistic interference. Turkish, Persian, and Mongolian influences entered the system of government and social life through technical and administrative

terms (Ezzat, 2022). However, rather than displacing the dominance of Arabic, this influence actually encouraged cultural transfer that enriched the Arabic linguistic treasure trove. Words such as *diwan*, *amir*, and *qanun* are examples of how foreign terms were absorbed and Arabized without changing the basic structure of the Arabic language (Rocchi, 2022).

This phenomenon demonstrates the adaptive capacity of the Arabic language to social and cultural change. It is not exclusive, but capable of absorbing external elements that broaden the intellectual horizons of Islam. In this context, Arabic acts as a cultural filter: absorbing useful terms while maintaining the theological and intellectual character of Islam. This process shows that the resilience of the Arabic language lies in its flexibility in dealing with outside influences.

Linguistic interference is also evident in the development of literature. Arabic poetry and prose in medieval Egypt began to show a new, more expressive and symbolic style, the result of interaction between classical Arabic traditions and Persian influences (Musaddiq, 2023). This shows that Arabic is not a static language, but rather a dynamic language that is open to aesthetic innovation. Egypt became the center of a new style of Arabic literature that later spread to the Maghreb and Andalusia (Kvelidze, 2024).

In addition to literary developments, this phenomenon of linguistic interference also extended to the scientific and philosophical fields. Persian influence, for example, introduced new concepts in philosophy and science that were later absorbed and translated into Arabic. Muslim scientists at that time not only wrote in Arabic, but also often adapted terms and ideas from Greek, Persian, and Indian traditions. For example, terms such as *hikmah* (wisdom) and *ilm* (science) became richer in meaning with the influence of various cultures (Hidayat et al., 2024).

In this case, Arabic not only absorbed technical terms from outside cultures, but also integrated them into the Islamic framework of thought. This is an example of how Arabic became a space for collaboration between various cultural traditions, allowing the language to develop without losing its identity and core values. The influence of the use of Arabic in government also creates socio-political synergy that strengthens Egypt's internal policies. For example, in the application of the legal system, Arabic is used as the language of law for drafting laws and fatwas.

Here, Arabic plays a role as the guardian of the integrity of the legal and social systems, which not only apply within Egypt, but also influence other Islamic territories (Abdel Haleem, 2006). This adaptation process has made Arabic increasingly rich and open to innovation, while maintaining its function as the main medium for the transmission of scientific, cultural, and spiritual knowledge in the Islamic world. The success of Arabic in accommodating outside influences while maintaining its theological and scientific characteristics shows that this language is not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of the resilience of Islamic culture and civilization, which is able to survive and adapt in the face of changing times.

Thus, cultural interference and transfer cannot be seen as a threat, but as a linguistic evolution that enriches Islamic scientific and cultural expression. The Arabic language in Egypt is a concrete example of how language functions as a space for interaction between civilizations that reinforce each other rather than negate each other. Arabic shows that the resilience of Islamic civilization lies in its ability to develop, adapt, and integrate various cultural influences while remaining faithful to its basic principles.

Arabic as a Symbol of Political and Civilizational Legitimacy

Arabic held a special position in the political system of medieval Egypt. The Mamluk rulers, despite being of non-Arab ethnicity, used Arabic as a tool to legitimize their power. All official

documents, state letters, fatwas, and Friday sermons were written in Arabic as a form of recognition of religious authority and Islamic scholarly tradition (2024, حميد & قرحاني). Thus, political power gained spiritual legitimacy through a language that was considered sacred and authentic.

This practice shows that Arabic was not only a symbol of communication, but also a means of forming an Islamic political identity. In many cases, the Mamluk rulers used Arabic to emphasize that they were not merely military rulers, but also protectors of religion and civilization. The use of Arabic in various aspects of government reinforced the perception that Egypt was the rightful heir to the Islamic caliphate after the fall of Baghdad.

Arabic also became a means of integration between the political elite and the ulema. Fatwas in Arabic issued by the ulema of Al-Azhar were used to support government policies, while the government provided protection and funding for scientific institutions (Mardani & Nissa, 2025). This collaboration created a symbiosis between power and scholarship based on a common language, namely Arabic.

Moreover, the consistent use of Arabic in the realm of power created a collective awareness that Egypt's Islamic identity lay in its language. Language became a symbol of resilience, pride, and continuity of civilization. Through Arabic, Islamic values and scientific heritage remain alive and are passed down across generations, making Egypt the center of Islamic civilization that stands firm amid the currents of history (Setyawan, 2021).

Apart from being a tool of political legitimacy, Arabic also plays an important role in building the collective identity of Egyptian Muslims. The use of Arabic at the governmental and religious levels ensures that Egypt remains a center of Islamic civilization that respects intellectual heritage, even amid intense political turmoil. In this context, Arabic serves not only for communication but also as a symbol of civilization that transcends political and ethnic boundaries (Omer, 1998).

The importance of Arabic in creating social and cultural integration is also evident in how it unites Egypt's diverse ethnic groups, such as Arabs, Kurds, and Turks. The use of Arabic in public and private spaces helps strengthen social solidarity and reduce the potential for divisions between ethnic and social groups (Madi, 2024). Furthermore, Arabic also serves as a link between the old and new generations. Through the study of Arabic in madrasas and other educational institutions, young Egyptian scholars and intellectuals can inherit and preserve the rich intellectual tradition of Islam. Al-Azhar remains a vital symbol in maintaining Arabic as a medium of education that connects the past with the future of Islam, making it an intellectual center that continues to produce new generations of Islamic thinkers (Laming et al., 2025).

Thus, the Arabic language in Egypt not only survives as a means of communication, but also as a guardian of civilization that ensures that Egypt remains a major force in preserving Islamic intellectual and religious traditions, even when facing major challenges from outside and within the country.

DISCUSSION

مناقشة

Based on the results obtained from various discussions in this article, it can be concluded that the Arabic language played a very large role in the intellectual and civilizational resilience of Egypt during the Crusades and the Mongol invasion. Amidst political crisis and the destruction of many Islamic institutions in other regions, Arabic became the main link that maintained the continuity of Islamic knowledge and religious identity. This language functioned as more than

just a tool for scientific communication; it also served as a symbol of legitimacy that strengthened Egypt's political and religious authority, especially under the Mamluk rulers.

The function of the Arabic language is also evident in education, particularly through institutions such as Al-Azhar and the Ayyubiyyah madrasah, which play a vital role in maintaining Arabic as the primary language of instruction. Here, Arabic is not only used to teach religious knowledge, but also to train scientific and theological reasoning, strengthening the thinking skills of Egypt's generation of scholars. This helped build a strong cultural identity and affirmed Egypt's role as an irreplaceable center of Islamic civilization.

On the other hand, linguistic interference during this period, due to Turkish, Persian, and Mongol influences, demonstrated the flexibility of Arabic in absorbing external elements without changing its basic structure and identity. This adaptation process enriched the linguistic treasure of Arabic and showed that Arabic not only survived but also developed and enriched Islamic scientific and cultural expression.

Overall, Arabic proved to be a pillar of resilience for Egypt, which not only maintained the continuity of Islamic science and religion but also strengthened its political, social, and cultural identity. The use of Arabic in fatwas, official documents, and education helps Egypt maintain its scientific and Islamic authority amid significant external challenges. Thus, Arabic in Egypt is more than just a means of communication; it is a symbol of civilization and cultural resilience that continues to flow through Islamic history.

CONCLUSION

خاتمة

This study has examined the important role of the Arabic language in Egypt's intellectual resilience and its contribution to the preservation of Islamic civilization during the Crusades and the Mongol invasions. Rather than functioning solely as a means of communication, Arabic appears to have operated, within the documented historical context of Ayyubid and Mamluk Egypt, as a key medium of intellectual, cultural, and political continuity. Through its use in scholarship, education, religion, and administration, Arabic helped sustain Egypt's position as a major center of Islamic thought despite the political upheavals and institutional destruction that affected other regions.

The findings of this study indicate that Arabic played multiple interconnected roles in medieval Egypt. It supported the transmission of religious and scientific knowledge, reinforced Islamic identity, and contributed to social and political cohesion across a diverse population. Through institutions such as Al-Azhar and the Ayyubid madrasahs, Arabic served not only as a language of religious and intellectual instruction but also as a symbol of scholarly legitimacy and political authority. In this sense, Arabic contributed to the continuity of Islamic intellectual life while also strengthening Egypt's broader civilizational role in the medieval Islamic world.

The study also shows that Arabic demonstrated a considerable degree of linguistic adaptability. In interaction with Turkish, Persian, and Mongol influences, Arabic incorporated external elements without losing its central position in scholarly, religious, and administrative contexts. This adaptability suggests that the resilience of Arabic was linked not only to its sacred and intellectual status, but also to its capacity to respond to changing historical circumstances. At the same time, such developments should be understood within the complexity of medieval Egypt, where linguistic practices may have varied across institutions, social groups, and regional settings.

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the analysis depends on the availability and accessibility of historical sources, which are unevenly preserved and often reflect elite, institutional, or official perspectives more strongly than everyday social experience. Second, the study relies largely on retrospective interpretation of written materials, which may not fully capture the diversity of linguistic practice in medieval Egypt. Third, although the article highlights Egypt as a major center of Arabic intellectual continuity, the broader regional variations within the Islamic world require further comparative investigation. Recognizing these limitations strengthens the need for caution in making broad historical generalizations.

Overall, this article contributes to a deeper understanding of how language can function as a central element in maintaining intellectual continuity, cultural identity, and political legitimacy during periods of crisis. In the case of medieval Egypt, Arabic can be understood as an important instrument of resilience that supported the preservation and transmission of Islamic knowledge under conditions of significant external and internal pressure.

For future research, more specific investigations are needed. These may include comparative analysis of Ayyubid and Mamluk manuscripts to trace shifts in linguistic and intellectual patterns, reception-history studies on the transmission of Arabic scholarly works into Europe and other regions, and digital humanities approaches for mapping, preserving, and analyzing medieval Arabic manuscripts. Such studies would deepen our understanding of how Arabic functioned not only as a language of scholarship, but also as a dynamic medium of historical continuity and cultural adaptation.

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